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TONIC BITTERS.

VOL. I.

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TONIC BITTERS.

A Nobel.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY LEGH KNIGHT.

VOL. I.

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v. 1

TONIC BITTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE Glasgow boat was overdue at Gourock, as was shown by the impatient looks of the two persons who were waiting for her on the little quay. One was the Gourock doctor—a tall, thin, large-boned man of fifty,—the other a plump, brisk, little woman of about the same age. When the boat at length arrived, the doctor bore down upon a red-haired, red-eyed miniature of himself, and strode off with the boy in one big hand, and his box in the other. The lady, with greater signs of agitation, trotted up to two young girls in deep mourning.

“I’m your aunt Euphemia, weans; and I’m vera glad to see ye,” was her abrupt greeting, with a strong western Scottish accent. “Come awa, come awa,” she added; “Jamie Mackellar will see to your bits of things, won’t you, Jamie? and we’ll gang awa hame, for your aunts are just wearying for the sight

of ye. Ye likely mind that sister Elizabeth, puir body, has na the right use of her limbs, and sister Janet couldna find it in her heart to leave her the day, seeing that Elizabeth was aye puir Davie's—your puir father's—favourite sister. And how did ye win through the far journey, weans? Your puir heads will be sore, I'm thinking."

"Sore, Aunt?" repeated the elder of the two girls, with a puzzled expression.

"With that nasty, puffing, smoking machine the day, and the coach yesterday, and before that the other thing—the railway, as they call it—praise be given, it's no *my* way, nor ever will be, so long as I'm in my right mind. And ye're na the worse of it? And ye'll have seen Mrs. Caird? And did she show ye the High Kirk?"

"No, we did not see anything in Glasgow, Aunt. It was a great pity."

"It was because we had no time," said the younger girl, hastily. "Mrs. Caird was very kind, and would have taken us to everything."

"Yes, oh yes, Mrs. Caird was very kind. She met us at the coach-office last night, and came with us on board the boat this morning. Her little nephew was with us all the way; he said he was coming to his father here."

"His father has got the laddie—that long man with the red head—he's just our doctor—Dr. Lang,

and Mrs. Caird was his wife's sister, puir body. And ye'll have seen London, lassies?" with a solemn sinking of her voice.

"No, it was a great pity, we could not see any more of London than we did of Glasgow. Gerard came with us from Pixycombe, and Harold met us when we got to London, and took us to sleep at the house of a friend of his at Gateshill—that is some distance from London—but he did not know any one nearer, and he did not like us to go to an inn."

"Of course not, my lammie. It's no the same thing as if the young men were your own born brothers."

"No, I suppose that was the reason. But I should have liked to see something of London; and we had to start from Gateshill so very early in the morning. I think he might have managed better."

"Jessie! he could not have been kinder or more thoughtful!" interrupted the younger girl again.

"No, he was very kind. But, Aunt, do *you* think there would have been any harm in our going to an inn, just for one night? I was so disappointed not to see anything of London. Effie did not care about it. What harm *could* there have been, Aunt?"

"I canna well say, bairn. But I'm thinking the young man, Mr. Yonge, had his good reasons. And it's no just fitting for bit lassies to be their lane in a big city with them that are no kin to them, and braw young laddies."

"I did so wish to see London," urged Jessie, still unconvinced.

"There's sister Janet!" cried aunt Euphemia, and as she spoke she ran forward, and opened the gate of a garden, where there stood a tall lady, remarkably square in form, and grey in colour. When she spoke, her deliberate tones were in striking contrast with her sister's hurried sentences.

"You are welcome, my nieces," said the elder aunt, as she kissed each of the girls on the forehead, and then she turned and led the way into the house, saying, "Your aunt Elizabeth is here."

On a sofa, in a pretty window overlooking the Clyde, lay the invalid sister, a little, shrivelled, bright-eyed woman, with large hands, and a sharp voice. The voice at once greeted the girls with, "Yes, here's the cranky body, laid on her back, when she's most wishful to be on her legs. Come away, bairns, come away!"

"Come awa! come awa!" echoed aunt Euphemia. "Come and show the puir body what like ye are."

"They'll do no such thing, sister Euphemia!" cried the invalid sharply. "I'll no be speering into the weans' faces when they're hungry and tired. You're no better than a wean yourself, with your clattering and your fashing, and your come awa'ing. You're like to make the bairns' heads sore, if the journey has not done it for them. I'll no set eyes

on them till they have eaten and rested ; so you had best take them to their chamber at once, and leave them in peace."

Aunt Euphemia obediently proceeded up-stairs, chattering all the time. "Puir sister Elizabeth ! She's a wee fractious the day. It's just a marvel how she lies there most times with never an ill word for any one—eh ! but she's an awful sufferer, your puir aunt Elizabeth ! Here's your chamber, lassies. I'm feared ye'll find it a bit wee, but I'm thinking ye're no over big yourselves, and what ye're no needing ye can just put past in the press yonder."

"Oh, what a lovely view !" cried Effie.

"Ye'll no be caring that the chamber's wee, if ye're that taken with the view, lassie. And you'll be puir Davie's 'little one' ?"

The girl turned her face quite away, and any one more observant than aunt Euphemia would have seen that she was trembling violently.

"Puir lammie," continued the talkative old lady, "ye'll no be sixteen yet, I'm thinking."

"I am just fifteen," answered Effie, with her face still averted.

"Puir wee body ! Sister Janet, are you minding that the bairn is but fifteen ?—puir Davie's 'little one.' "

"Yes, I am minding it. Here, lassies, just drink this off, and you will be the better of it." She was

carrying a tray, on which were two tumblers, and a steaming compound, which she immediately poured out.

Jessie tasted it. "Oh, Aunt, how good! What is it?"

"It's just a little hot toddy to warm you after your journey, and then we will tuck you up in your beds, and you must lie there till we cry upon you for tea. Come, come, away with it all. It will not harm you."

Jessie did as she was told, but when Effie's turn came, she stoutly rebelled, though only with the low-spoken words, "Indeed, Aunt, I would rather not."

Aunt Janet persisted quietly, and aunt Euphemia remonstrated volubly, till at length Jessie explained, "She never will take any wine or spirits. Papa objected to everything of the sort for children."

Aunt Janet turned away without a word, but aunt Euphemia broke out with, "And she is her father's very own self; that was just his way of looking, bless him! Do you mind that glint of his bonnie brown eyes, sister Janet? The wean has just his eyes. But *you'll* be your mother's bairn," she added, turning to Jessie. "Davie wrote us that his elder wean was of a rare beauty, like her mother before her. Ye'll no be minding your mother, lassies?"

"Did papa say that of me, Aunt? I did not know that he thought me like poor mamma. I wonder

whether I really am like her. She was *very* beautiful, you know, Aunt. I was twelve when she died, and I remember her quite well—Effie was only seven. I don't think I am like her picture that we have. I hope I *am* like her. I wish so much to be beautiful."

"Why do you wish to be beautiful, lassie?" asked aunt Janet, dryly.

"It is so pleasant to be admired. And then plain people don't get on so well—no one takes notice of them in company—and they don't get married."

"Is that such a sad fate, Jessie?"

"Yes, Aunt, I think so. Nobody cares for old maids."

"The wean is right, sister Janet. No woman in her right senses would bide her lane if she could get a man to her mind; and no doubt but the bonnie ones have a better chance in the matter than we plain bodies."

"But *you* must have been handsome, aunt Janet."

"And you are wondering why I am an old maid, eh, lassie? What does the little one think?"

"You must not mind Jessie's nonsense, Aunt," replied Effie, who had looked very flushed and angry whilst her sister was talking.

"Now you must just lay yourselves down, and rest your poor sore backs. Come away, Effie; you would not take the toddy to pleasure me, but you must not show yourself a wilful woman in all things."

Effie lay down with admirable docility, and her aunt immediately proceeded to rub all over her face and neck a sweet white ointment, which she said was to preserve the complexion after exposure to the sea air. She then tightly tucked up her patient under two heavy blankets and an eider-down coverlet, and drew the curtains close all round the bed. The same ceremony was performed with Jessie, and the aunts left the room on tiptoe.

“How do you feel, Jessie?” cried Effie, from her nest.

“On the brink of suffocation. I can’t lie here any longer.”

“We can’t be so ungrateful as to get up directly. The idea of my brown face being treated with such consideration!”

“I wonder whether this nasty salve is really any good to the complexion. It makes me feel quite faint. I shall be ill if I stay here any longer. I feel very ill already.”

“You should not have spoken so of old maids, Jessie.”

“Why not? No one does care for old maids.”

“But no one can prevent their caring for others, and that is what makes happiness really.”

“Now don’t moralise, Effie—that’s all that is needed to finish me completely. Oh, dear! I really am going to be ill. I feel so very strange!” With

this exclamation Jessie sprang out of bed, and hurried to the window.

“Effie ! do you think that tall red man is the only doctor here ? I am sure I could not feel confidence in him.”

“It is to be hoped we shan’t want to have confidence in any doctor.”

“*You* may not, but it is not likely that I shall be here any time without being obliged to consult some one. I think I ought to see a doctor at once. I am sure the journey has been too much for me—I feel so very weak and strange.”

“I don’t wonder you feel strange after that jorum. The only wonder is that you are not rolling on the floor.”

“How unfeeling you are, Effie ! As if that had anything to do with it. I tell you the journey, and all that I went through before, have had a most injurious effect on my constitution. I may probably suffer from it for many years. If I find that there is any doctor besides ‘that long man’ I shall certainly speak to him at once. There is no saying what mischief may be brewing.”

“I hope it will not turn out such a strong brew as the toddy.”

“Effie ! I will not stand your impertinence !”

“Very well, then, I will go to sleep, to please those dear old ladies.”

Jessie, after speaking once or twice and obtaining no answer, threw herself again on the bed, and was soon sleeping soundly. Effie then sat up in her enclosure, and, unfastening her dress, drew out a small card-case, which was tied round her waist. From this she took several minute packets, and spreading them on the bed, proceeded to look earnestly at them, one after the other. First there was a lock of short grey hair, folded carefully in paper, with a long tress of dark brown. Then a similar paper containing a piece of soft wavey hair of a pale tan colour, and a crisp curl of that bright golden hue which is seldom seen in any hair after childhood. These were all reverently folded up again, and put back in their place. Then came three cards, on which an evidently unaccustomed hand had traced in coloured chalks the head of a venerable-looking clergyman; of a vigorous, fair-haired man of about five-and-twenty; and of a handsome boy of eighteen, evidently the original owner of the golden curl. These also were reverently handled and put away in the tiny case, which Effie again fastened round her waist, and concealed under her dress. She then emerged from her prison, and began unpacking and arranging her clothes. When the tea was announced, Effie was quite ready, but Jessie had to scramble up from the bed, where she had forgotten her ailments in sleep.

When the girls had been about a fortnight at Gourock some of Effie's treasures were exposed to other eyes than her own. One afternoon the more vigorous aunts had gone out to pay charitable visits, and the two nieces were left with the invalid.

"And what like is this hero of yours, Effie?" asked aunt Elizabeth, when Effie had been hotly asserting that there was no one in the world so noble, so generous, and so kind as Harold Yonge.

"He is not my hero, Aunt; but he is a dear, good fellow, and Jessie never will do him justice."

"And what like is he?"

"Show Aunt your portraits of the two boys, Effie."

Effie coloured. "Oh, they're so bad. Aunt could never judge of the boys from those scrawls."

"May 'Aunt' see 'those scrawls,' please, Effie," urged the aunt.

So Effie had nothing for it but to produce them.

"And this will be Harold the Great? Well, it is a bonnie face, and a good face."

"Oh, Aunt, not 'bonnie,'" cried Jessie. "Harold has no sort of good looks."

"It is a good face, Aunt," said Effie, "and it is 'bonnie.' I can't think what fault Jessie finds with it. His features are good, and his fair hair is very nice, and his eyes are beautiful—so blue, and honest, and kind."

"Well done, wee defender! Yes, it is a good

face. But, bairns, who's this? *This* is the bonnie laddie."

"Oh, yes, Aunt," said Jessie. "No one would look at Harold by the side of Gerard. Gerard is handsome."

"And this is Gerard. Truly a winsome young man. These are the eyes and the hair of a bairn."

"Yes, Aunt," said Effie, with suppressed eagerness, "they are very peculiar. His eyes are deep violet, with long black lashes, and his hair is quite a golden brown. That ugly thing does not give you any idea of what he is really like."

"And yon lads were as brothers to you," pursued aunt Elizabeth, after a short pause.

"Yes, just like brothers," returned Effie, hastily. "Captain Archer Yonge was a very old friend of—of papa's," she added, lowering her voice.

"Ay. I mind the day dear Davie first brought Frederick Yonge to the manse, when we were all bit weans."

"Then did you know Captain Archer Yonge, Aunt?" cried Effie. "He must have been such a good man, from what Harold says."

"The lad will have been but a bairn when his father—when he parted from his father."

"Harold was twelve when they first came to us, and I was seven," said Jessie.

"They never saw their father after that," pursued

Effie. "In about a year the news came that Captain Archer Yonge had died of yellow fever. Mrs. Yonge died, you know, when Gerard was four years old, just before they came to us."

"It was just like dear Davie to take the charge of three bairns, when he had a handful of his own."

"What could he do, Aunt? Captain Yonge had nowhere to leave the boys when he went to sea. He had no other friends who would take them."

"And it was no trouble to us; one or two more did not make much difference in our nursery then."

"Effie talks very grandly of 'us'—you would not think she was not two years old at the time."

"And afterwards they were a great comfort," pursued Effie, paying no attention to her sister's remark, "when—when the fever came."

"Ah! poor Davie! We might not write him in his sorrow, but we sorrowed with him."

"Why might you not write, Aunt?"

"Our father was vexed with Davie for leaving the Kirk in which the Garnocks had been ministers for many generations. I'll no believe but that Davie's heart was aye with us. It was na the doctrines of his own Kirk that scared him from her; it was the yoke which has been laid upon us in her name that was too strait for his generous nature—the yoke of a cold and heartless intolerance." The old lady's eyes were flashing, and her cheeks glowing. Presently

she continued more calmly, "Whenever Davie entered the English Church we were bidden to hold no communion with him. Eh, bairns, it was a bitter struggle between duty to our father, and love to our dear brother! And oh! it was bitter indeed to know of his sorrow, and to be hindered writing him a word of sympathy. You are too young to mind that time, bairns."

"Oh, no, Aunt," said Jessie, "I remember it perfectly. You know it was only a year later that poor mamma died, and I was twelve then."

"It will likely have been the loss of her weans that broke your poor mother's heart."

"Yes," said Jessie, "both papa and mamma thought more of Walter than of all the rest of us."

"It is always the best that go in that way, is not it, Aunt?" asked Effie, with an indignant glance at her sister.

"It mostly seems so, bairn; but we are no fit to say what is best for us. What like was Bessie, my namechild?"

"Papa has always said since that she was very sweet and beautiful, but I don't remember that she was at all remarkable."

"Oh, Jessie! Harold says she was lovely, and so good-tempered."

"Allan was my favourite," continued Jessie, "poor dear little fellow! He had always been very delicate,

and yet he fought with the fever longer than any of them. I had it, you know, Aunt, and I don't think I have ever been quite strong since."

"Who first took ill?"

"Reggie Yonge went over to see Harold at Cheltenham. The fever broke out there the next day, and Reggie came home at once. I suppose he brought it in his clothes, for in a week little Allan sickened, and then I, and then Walter and Bessie. Bessie died first, and Walter was getting better, when Reggie was taken ill, and died the same day, and somehow it was not kept from Walter, and the shock killed him, too. I don't wonder at it, I am sure I thought I should have died when they told me Walter was dead, though I was getting well then. And when we came back from Ilfracombe, and the house seemed so sad and quiet, I always felt as if the fever were still there."

"Poor Davie," said aunt Elizabeth, wiping her eyes, "what a trial!"

"I think papa never got over Walter's death," observed Jessie.

"Harold was everything then," said Effie, "and Gerard—Gerard was such a bright little fellow, he cheered up the whole house."

"Yes," continued Jessie, rather bitterly, "papa and mamma both turned to them for comfort, instead of to us. I sometimes used to think they disliked Effie and me for having lived when the others died."

“For shame, Jessie!” cried Effie, indignantly. “I am sure it is no wonder if Harold and Gerard were more comfort to them than we were. Jessie was frightened about herself, Aunt, and was always crying, and I was a fearfully naughty child, and must have been an intolerable nuisance in the house. I can remember how good and kind Harold was to every one, and nobody could help loving Gerard.”

“And can no one help loving Gerard now?” asked aunt Elizabeth.

Effie coloured violently, and Jessie remarked, “Effie thinks all the world ought to lie on the ground before Harold and Gerard. Harold is certainly very good—he is one of those people who can’t help being good. It seems as if he never had any temptations like other people.”

“And yet your father wrote me at one time that the lad was abiding in some foreign land, if I mind rightly.”

“Yes, Aunt, he was at Bonn, at the College there. But it did not do him any harm. How do you think it is that it is so much easier for some people to be good than it is for others?”

“I think each one knows his own burden best, lassie, and we are all ever ready to think our own the only laden back.”

“I am sure Harold has no burden to bear, Aunt.”

“He has a grave face for so young a man,”

remarked aunt Elizabeth, again looking at the portrait.

“He *is* grave,” said Effie, “but he is very seldom sad.”

“And this bonnie face that has stolen my heart, can this be sad?” asked the old lady, referring to the other sketch.

“Gerard? oh, no,” answered Jessie, “he can never even be grave.”

“Sometimes,” murmured Effie.

“Of course, when he is in grief,” returned Jessie, shortly. “Do you think that a very lively person must necessarily be unsteady, Aunt?”

“Doubtless a dancing heart has more trouble to keep a steady step. But I am no agreeing with those who hold that all mirth is sin.”

“Papa used to be often very uneasy about Gerard,” said Jessie. “Aunt, this room is so hot,” she added, “I feel quite faint. I think I will go out and meet aunt Euphemia.”

“And why was your papa uneasy about Gerard?” asked aunt Elizabeth, when Jessie had left the room.

Effie hesitated, as she always did before mentioning her father. “Papa was so fond of Gerard. The last thing he said to me was, ‘Take care of my poor Gerard.’”

“You bit wean! Why should Davie tell you to take care of a young man grown?”

“Gerard does need taking care of, Aunt,” replied Effie, gravely. “He is so good-tempered that he gives way to every one. And then he is so unselfish, that he never quite knows his own mind.”

“A dangerous character,” thought aunt Elizabeth, but she did not say so. After a long silence, she began, “I’m thinking, Effie, that you are just myself as I was at your age. Nay, bairn, there is no need to be vexed. I was not always the cranky lameter that I am now.”

“Indeed, Aunt, I was not vexed. I should be very glad to be like you.”

“Oh, dinna wish that, bairn! I’m a poor bootless body, and I have but myself to thank for it. Come beside me, lassie, and I’ll tell you what laid me here on my back.”

Effie seated herself on the floor in front of her aunt’s sofa.

“I’ll have been just your age when dear Davie brought Frederick Yonge to the house. Eh, but he was bonnie, the bit sailor laddie! Not so *real* bonnie as yon laughing rogue in your picture; but something between him and the fair-haired brother. I was not so to say sick then, but I was a weakly, puling lassie, and Frederick Yonge was aye the one to help and tend me, and so—I was but a wean, and did not rightly know what a folly it was—I just set my whole heart on the bright-eyed, soft-voiced laddie.

Eh, bairn, but it was just idolatry, which is ‘as the sin of witchcraft.’ He was both this world, and the other world to me. I never thought of marriage, or that I would ever be anything to him—it was just joy enough to hear his voice, and to feel his presence. The very sound of his footfall was more to me than parents, and brethren, and home and faith; eh! bairn, but it was an awful sin! I schooled myself to think that the end must come at some time; but when it did come, it was a bitter cup. Our great trouble was to the others no more than the loss of a dear brother, but to me it was the setting of my sun—the ending of my life. Whenever Davie was driven from his home, never more to return, then I knew that never more would I hear the voice that was my only music. I was a lass of twenty then. When I was thirty, I chanced to see an English journal, and there I read,—‘On the 4th inst., at Malta, the wife of Captain Frederick Archer Yonge, of a son,’—that would likely be your Harold,—it was five-and-twenty years ago. I suppose I had a glint of hope till then, but then I sank and sank, till I sank on to this sofa, and became the old piece of lumber that you see.”

Effie did not raise her face, which she had hidden in her aunt’s dress. The old lady continued more lightly,—“And now that I have finished my tale, which no one ever heard before, I will just give you the moral, if you have not found it for yourself.

Never set up an idol in your heart, lassie—never let a *man* fill the throne that should be kept for One above. Are you heeding me, my bairn?"

"Yes, Aunt," whispered Effie, without raising her head. But in the silence that ensued, the girl, guessing the suspicion which had led her aunt to tell her this tale, felt with a half-frightened triumph that the warning came too late. And the aunt knew that it was so, and as she thought of Effie's childish face, with its strange womanly expression, she pondered sadly on the hereditary precocity which had made two of the same family plunge into life's most troubled current at an age when they should have been safe in its quietest shallows.

CHAPTER II.

EFFIE GARNOCK was very happy in her new life—as happy as she could be so soon after the loss of her father, and of her dear old home. She enjoyed the society of her aunts; the quiet thoughtful talks with the invalid; the rambles over the hills and on the shore with the active Euphemia; the visits to poor cottages with Miss Garnock; and the occasional excursions among the lovely scenery of the Clyde with good-natured neighbours. To Jessie all this soon became very tiresome. She missed the universal homage which she had received at Pixycombe, where her father's simple parishioners made no secret of their pride in their beloved pastor's beautiful daughter. The aunts were too sensible to gratify Jessie's evident love of admiration, but they were rather inclined to fall into the opposite error of fostering Effie's already strong sense of moral superiority to her sister. So Effie luxuriated in the unwonted appreciation of her precocious mental powers,

whilst Jessie pined for the accustomed tribute to her physical charms. Jessie's craving was satisfied in an unexpected manner, when the girls had been rather more than a month at Gourock.

"Here's a letter for you, Effie, enclosed in one from Harold to me. What can Harold have to say?"

Effie coloured, and then turned rather paler than usual as she recognised Gerard's well-known hand:

"Trin. Coll., Sunday, October 24th.

"DEAR OLD WOMAN,

Tell me what Hay is writing to the Beauty. He has not been himself a bit since he came up on Friday evening, and I am sure he is telling Jessie what is wrong, though he won't tell me—so much for fraternal duty! I hope he is not in any mess, though that is not likely; but since he has been writing that letter to the Beauty, he has been going on in a way that has made my hair stand on end. I say! He can't be in love with Cleopatra! What fun if that is it! Now, on your allegiance I command you to write instantly and tell me what's up. If there is not something more than ordinary in that letter I'll eat my wig, and if you don't tell me what it is, I'll eat yours. Do now, there's a dear little pigmy. It is horribly flat here; but I suppose it will be better after my first year. Freshmen always find College life an awful bore. A good many Eton fellows came

up at the same time with me, but none of my set ; and I have not made many new acquaintances. I wish girls were admitted here ! It would be awfully jolly to have you, old woman. So give my respects to Cleopatra—the beauty !—and believe me to remain, dear mite,

“ Your affectionate Friend,

“ GAY.”

Jessie’s letter was of a very different character :

“ Cambridge, October 24th.

“ DEAREST JESSIE,

“ If you are surprised at this beginning you must not be angry. It is no more than the truth. You have been not ‘ my dearest *Jessie*’ only, but my dearest of all, for as long as I can remember. I never told you this before, because I thought the time had not yet come. In those wretched days at Pixycombe in June, and again when I saw you in London, I was sorely tempted to speak out. But I was determined that you should have time well to consider your future prospects before I tried in any way to influence you. Now you have been a month with your aunts, and can judge whether such a life is suited to you. I cannot think that it is suited to you. I will tell you what I have to offer in exchange for it. For the last year I have said little to you about myself. I was waiting till I could speak with

certainty of my growing success, and whilst I waited, he of whose interest I was most certain was taken from us. Then I had no heart to speak of *success*. But now I must tell you the position in which I stand. I have no longer a struggle to get on. For many months I have felt no doubt of a steady continuance of as much work with my pencil as I can manage, and this—unless my eyes or my right hand should fail me,—insures me a yearly income of from 200*l.* to 300*l.* A few successful pictures and an occasional art-critique in some Magazine add another 150*l.* Thus, you see, taking my incomings at the lowest estimate, I can count on from 350*l.* to 450*l.* to commence with. As I become better known, and a greater adept in my art, my profits will, of course, increase. All this is very unromantic, but it is necessary that you should be informed of these details. I do not believe for a moment that any worldly advantages—far, far more brilliant than I have to offer, would influence you. But oh, my darling! Let it influence you to know that I offer you the deepest devotion, and the most unswerving constancy, and that it is in your power to make the life's happiness of

“Your ever loving

“HAROLD A. YONGE.

“P.S. Gay has just announced his arrival at the wise conclusion that I am in love.”

Effie had long since arrived at Gerard's conclusion, so, as soon as she had read of his belief that there was something unusual in Harold's letter, she began to watch her sister with some anxiety. Jessie flushed up directly she commenced reading, but it was a flush more of surprise than of gratification. When she had come to the end of her letter, she exclaimed, "Effie! What *do* you think?"

"That Harold has proposed to you," answered Effie, quietly.

"How did you know?"

"I knew he cared for you."

"Did he ever tell you so?"

"No, never,—but it was easily seen."

"I never saw it. Why did you not warn me?"

"Warn you! You don't mean, Jessie, that you are sorry for it?"

"I don't know," answered Jessie meditatively.

"No, I don't think I am sorry exactly—but I don't think I am glad. I don't know what to feel. How *ought* I to feel, Effie? How should *you* feel?"

"How should I feel if a man like Harold—brave, tender, noble—were to tell me he loved me! I should feel as if I were thousands of miles higher—I should feel as if the world were too small to hold me and my happiness."

"But are you sure Harold *is* all you say? He is brave, certainly—but I never thought him tender.

He writes very nicely about his feelings—Here, you may see, Effie.—Not quite enough. It is rather short for a love-letter, and I don't like his hand, it's so round and sprawling, like a clerk's. Well, what do you think of the letter, Effie?"

"I think it is like himself—all that could be wished."

"Do you really think him noble, Effie? I wish he were taller, and then that light hair is so like a ploughboy's, and, Effie, are you sure that a designer is a gentleman? I don't feel at all easy about that. It is not one of the professions, so it must rank as a trade.—I don't believe artists and designers, and that sort of people, are thought much of, and I should not at all like my husband to be looked down upon."

"Jessie! As if any one would dare to look down upon Harold! As if an artist did not take the very highest rank! Do people look down upon Raphael, or Michael Angelo? How can you talk such nonsense, Jessie?"

Jessie went on with her own thoughts, taking no notice of her sister's outburst: "'Then he dresses so badly. He wears such ugly waistcoats! And his coats never fit. And he is so silent in company, and never tries to make himself agreeable, and——"

"I don't believe you care about him at all, Jessie," broke in Effie, most indignantly.

"Of course I care about him—I like him very

much, and all that sort of thing. I wish you had told me he was in love with me, Effie. He is quite right about this not being the kind of life to suit me," she continued, referring to the letter. "It tries me very much. The pokiness and dullness, and all the aunts' old maidish ways make me feel quite ill and nervous; and I am sure I shall be ill if something is not done to give me a change soon."

"How can you talk so when my aunts are so kind, and think of nothing but how to make us comfortable? And I am sure it is not dull. I could live for ever with aunt Elizabeth; she gives one some fresh idea every minute."

"Oh! of course it is all very well for you. You were cut out for an old maid, and dullness seems your native element. But now you are not thinking about all my troubles, and what I am to say to Harold."

"What *can* you say? You either love him, or you do not."

"But I don't either love him, or not. I don't know which I do. Oh dear! I wish some one would help me—I am so very much worried," and she seemed on the point of crying.

"Look here, Jessie. Let us see if we cannot make out what your feelings really are. Do you like being with Harold?"

"Yes, I like being with him; he is always kind, and then he always knows what to do whatever

happens ; and when there is no one else by, I don't mind about his appearance."

Effie let this pass with only an impatient gesture, and continued : " Are you glad when you can do anything to please him ?"

" Yes," answered Jessie, promptly, " I like to please him ; he is not very lavish of his thanks, and somehow they seem worth more than most people's."

This was satisfactory, and the examiner continued with greater heart : " You would not like him to care for any one else ?"

" No, that I certainly should not ! Fancy Harold caring for any one besides all of us !" Jessie was quite excited now.

" But not 'all of us,' Jessie. You would not like him to care for me more than for you."

" That is an absurd question. Of course it would be quite a different thing.—You are only a child."

" Of course," said Effie, calmly, but she looked hurt. " And you like that other people should like him ?" she continued.

" I don't know," replied Jessie, losing her interest : " I never thought about it."

" Well, we can do without that," said Effie, proceeding to sum up : " You like Harold's society ; you desire to please him ; and you are jealous of his loving any one but yourself. All this looks very much as if you did care for him, Jessie."

“Does it? I hope it is so. I am sure I should be much happier with him than remaining here, and I suppose that is the alternative—he evidently thinks so. Well then, am I to write and tell Harold I am willing to marry him?”

“If you care for him,” said Effie, rather startled by her sister’s coolness.

“You say I care for him, so I suppose it is all right. You have thought more of such things than I have; you know you were always our oracle on those matters.”

So, with Effie’s help, the following answer was written :—

“Gourock. Tuesday.

“MY DEAR HAROLD,

“Your letter was a great surprise to me. I had never at all thought that you cared for me in that way. You see we have all been so like brothers and sisters together, that it seems very strange to think of any other connection. You are quite right in what you say about Gourock not suiting me. I don’t think it agrees with me either physically or mentally. I often feel very low and weak. My aunts are very kind, but they do not understand me at all. I am sure I should be happier with you. I think from what you say your prospects seem very good, but I cannot quite understand what rank a designer holds,

—is he looked upon as a gentleman? Perhaps you will explain this to me when you write again. I hope you *will* write, or I shall be afraid I have offended you. I cannot say decidedly that I will do as you wish, because I have been so taken by surprise that I can hardly tell whether I like you enough to marry you. But I *do* really like you very much, and I think when I get used to the idea, that I shall be able to like you *quite* as I ought.

“In any case, I shall be ever

“Your affectionate Friend,

“JESSIE ISABEL GARNOCK.”

Jessie would have run on for pages of uncertainty—one sentence contradicting another—but Effie resolutely struck out all wanderings. Jessie, however, would not submit to all her sister's amendments; she would on no account give up the inquiry as to a designer's rank, which Effie considered especially objectionable.

As soon as the letter was despatched Jessie repented that it had not contained a more decided rejection, saying that she was sure she did not love Harold enough to marry him, but that after what she had written to him it would not be honourable to draw back. Effie began to think that it certainly would be wrong for Jessie to become engaged, with so little true feeling, and that she herself had done very

foolishly in persuading her sister to give Harold any hope. When, however, a week had passed without any letter from Harold—a dull, stormy week, with the mountains hidden in clouds, and the Clyde one sheet of foam,—Jessie altered her tone, and lamented that she had not more decidedly accepted the love which would have secured her a refuge from this gloomy life. It was too late now, she said; Harold was evidently deeply offended, and they should probably never see nor hear from him again. This mood was even more trying than the former one, and it became almost unendurable to Effie when her sister's troubles took the form of physical ailments in which *she* did not believe. The aunts were less sceptical, or more compassionate, and Dr. Lang was sent for. His treatment of the case was very much to Effie's taste, and very little to Jessie's.

“Ah, I know,” he said curtly, when Jessie had been detailing her symptoms at great length; “a trifling cold, supervening upon a little biliary derangement, and a slight prostration of the nervous system. Your aunt Euphemia must give you a posset, and I shall do the rest with a pill and a draught. We'll soon set you up between us, won't we, Miss Euphemia? By-the-by, I saw widow Bain yesterday, and she was very much aggrieved at not having seen any of you ladies lately. Will you be passing that way soon, Miss Euphemia?”

"I was calling for the puir body this morning, doctor, and found her very sick. She is wearying to see you the day, but I just told her it was no reasonable to be aye crying on you."

"Reasonable or not reasonable, I must go to the poor soul, so good morning, ladies. You'll not need me again, Miss Jessie."

"I knew I could never feel confidence in that man," said Jessie, when aunt Euphemia had bustled out after the doctor. "How shamefully he treated me! He never attended to anything I told him about myself, and seemed in a hurry to be gone all the time. I am sure I shall not take his medicine,—a pill and a draught for a person in my weak state! It would be enough to kill me! I wish I were in London, or in some other place where I could see a doctor who knows something of his profession—not a conceited ignoramus like this. A posset, indeed! Why, I want bracing. Really, Effie, it is a serious matter. I am positively wasting away—sinking into my grave before your eyes—and you have none of you the sense to see it. But you none of you care whether I live or die. The aunts only think of *you*, and you never had the least feeling for me. The only person who cares for me has been estranged from me. Oh, if Harold were but here! If you had not persuaded me to write that unfortunate letter, I should have been engaged to him by this time, and

he would not have allowed me to remain here, ill and miserable. But now that is all over! I have cast off his love, and no one else will ever love me so well. *He* would not have made light of my illness. But now I shall never see him again. I shall never have——”

“Look there, Jessie!” cried Effie, a sudden glow overspreading her face as she stood at the window.

Jessie looked as she was bid, and the glow spread to her face also. “There he is!” she cried. “Oh, Effie, what shall I say to him?”

She was not required to say much. Harold Yonge was one of those gentle, firm men who invariably have their own way with weaker characters, and he knew Jessie well enough not to expect any decided expression of feeling from her. Considering how apt she was to worry herself with indecision, he had not written again, but had chosen to wait until he could himself come and settle all her doubts for her.

“So you think I am not a gentleman, Jessie?” he said, when he had persuaded her to take a turn with him whilst the aunts were engaged in hospitable preparations for his entertainment.

“No, not you, Harold; only—I don’t know what sort of people designers generally are.”

“I am not a designer merely, Jessie. I lay claim to being an artist and an art-critic.”

“Then that, I suppose, is higher.”

“So the world thinks, I believe. But, Jessie, you know as well as I do that all such distinctions are nothing—that it is not the position makes the man, but the man makes his position. I feel something within me which tells me that if I am happy I shall be successful—and success is rank. So you see, Jessie, you can make me of what rank you please. For you can make me happy, darling, and the rest will follow.”

“Will it?” asked Jessie, doubtfully.

“Yes, it will,” replied Harold, with perfect confidence; “I know that it will.”

“How do you know that you—that you care for me, Harold?”

“How do I know! How do I know that the sun shines?”

“The sun is not shining now,” objected Jessie, simply.

“Yes it is, my darling, only this Scotch mist hides it from us. And that is the case with you, Jessie. I believe that you have a little real love for me shining behind these mists of doubt of yourself and of me. Is it not so?” Seeing that she looked still unsatisfied, he continued—“But there are no mists over my love. It has been shining on for years so brightly that if ever I can get you to trust yourself under its rays it will soon dispel all your clouds. Come, Jessie, try its power.”

"I don't quite understand you, Harold. What do you want me to do?"

"To say that you love me a little, and that you will let me love you—Jessie!" he cried, with a sudden deepening of his voice; "I cannot tell you how much I love you!"

"I do like you very much, Harold,—but——"

"That will do, my dearest. I can do all the rest!" cried Harold, rapturously. "Then that is settled. And now, when will you come to me, and be my very own?"

"To London?" cried Jessie, joyfully.

"Yes. Or not exactly to London. I am afraid my country rose would lose its bloom in the smoke of London. I thought of Gateshill."

"Gateshill seemed a very pretty place from the little I saw of it. Do you think it is a healthy place?"

"Oh, yes, extremely healthy—the air is most bracing. We shall soon have you looking quite yourself again there."

"I am certainly not myself here. I feel so very dull and depressed. And I don't like Dr. Lang at all."

"Who is Dr. Lang?"

"The only doctor here—or, at least, the only doctor my aunts would like me to consult."

"You have not required a doctor, have you, my darling?" asked Harold, anxiously.

"I have *required* a doctor for a long time, but Effie laughed at me, and I did not like to make a fuss. To-day, however, I felt so very unwell that I could not keep up any longer, so I saw Dr. Lang. But I don't think he is at all clever in his profession."

"He does not think you are seriously unwell, I hope, Jessie?"

"I don't think he understood my case at all. If I go to London I must see some physician in whom I can feel confidence."

"You shall, my own darling. And when will you come to London, Jessie?"

"How do you mean? Where should I go to?"

"To me."

"You mean when we are married, then."

"Next month, Jessie?"

"Oh, no. Not so soon as that. I could not be married in such deep mourning."

"Your father would have been so glad."

"Yes, but people would be shocked."

"January would not be too soon. Nobody could be shocked if we were married at the beginning of January."

"It is such a short time to get ready."

"What have you to get ready?"

"Oh, I don't know. Girls always have so many new things when they are married."

"I don't want you to have any 'new things.' I want *you*, not your 'things.'"

"But I could not marry without a trousseau, you know."

"I did not know. How long does it take to get a trousseau?"

"Two or three months."

"Well, I will give you three months. That will be the middle of January."

"It had better be February. It would be very nice to be married on Valentine's day."

"No, no. You are always my Valentine, without that. The 14th of January; not a day later. I shall be able to make you happy, I am sure, Jessie. Don't you think so, dearest?"

"Yes, I suppose so. There is Effie beckoning to us. Dinner must be ready. We had better go in."

Effie, as she watched the two coming in, was infinitely relieved at the sight of Harold's radiant face.

"Congratulate me, my dear little sister!" he cried, as he caught her at the drawing-room door. "And give me a brother's due," he added, stooping to kiss her. Effie threw her arms round his neck in childish fashion, and whispered eagerly, "Oh, dear, dear Harold, I *am* so glad!"

"Come into the room with me, little one; I

cannot face the aunts alone, and Jessie has escaped."

The silent man had plenty to say now, and he said it gracefully enough.

"I am afraid you will hate me, aunts—may I call you aunts? I am going to rob you wickedly. I must try and move your compassion before I confess my evil intentions." He drew a chair to aunt Elizabeth's sofa, and continued—"I have had such a happy home ever since I was twelve years old, that the loss of it is more than I can bear,"—his trembling voice here instantly enlisted the aunts in his favour. "I am now in a position to secure a home of my own. Is it to be wondered at that I desire to gain for my very own a part—the dearest part—of the same home in which my boyhood and youth were passed? Am I very selfish to ask you for these two girls?" Jessie at that moment entered the room, and Harold, as he spoke, rose, and with one hand drew her arm through his, whilst with the other he caught Effie by the shoulder.

"Both!" cried aunt Euphemia "Does the man want two wives?"

Effie's eyes sparkled as she raised them gratefully to Harold's face.

"You are thrown in with Jessie, are you not, Effie? We should never keep right without your sageship to direct us."

“Are you for leaving your old aunts, bairn?” asked aunt Elizabeth.

Effie looked distressed.

“She has no choice in the matter, Aunt,” said Harold. “We could not get on without her, could we, Jessie?”

“Effie is so fond of my aunts, that I suppose she would rather stay with them,” replied Jessie, whose face had become rather cloudy.

“Well, Effie, which shall it be?” inquired Harold, looking at her with confident affection.

“You, Harold,” Effie replied, putting her hand on his hand, which still lay on her shoulder. Then she suddenly turned from him to her aunt Elizabeth, and bending over the sofa, whispered—“Dear aunt Elizabeth, I love you very much, but Harold has been my own brother all my life.”

“God bless you, my bairn, wherever you go!” said the invalid, with something very like a sob.

“Now then, good folks,” broke in aunt Euphemia. “I’m no doubting that sentiment is vera well in its way, but in the meantime the hotch-potch is getting cold. So come awa, come awa!”

Aunt Euphemia kept up a lively chatter whilst they dined, but the others could find little to say, and they were all glad to return to aunt Elizabeth’s sofa.

“And now I must be off again,” said Harold, after talking for a short time to the invalid. “I have an

engagement in London on Thursday morning, and I shall only just manage to get there in time. Now, aunts, remember, whatever this young woman may say against it, I am going to be married in the middle of January. It must be before Gerard's Christmas vacation ends. Then I shall have a little time alone with my wife"—he stopped with a half choke, and they all laughed in rather a quavering manner. "And then Effie will come to us, and we must all get comfortably settled before Gay comes home at Easter. I wanted it all to be over, ready for the boy at Christmas, but Jessie declared that to be quite impossible, and that, for reasons of state, I must not think of any time earlier than February. She wanted to fix on the 14th of February, for luck's sake. But we don't need any such encouragement. We can't help being a happy couple, can we, aunt Elizabeth? Give us your blessing, aunts; and now good-bye. Good-bye, little sister. Keep her in mind of me, Effie," he whispered, and then drew Jessie from the room with him.

When the sisters met again, Jessie asked, "What did you think of him, Effie? He was very nice, was not he? I think I really do care about him very much. I suppose he is very fond of me. Do you think he is?"

"You know he is, Jessie! How absurd to ask such a question!"

“I suppose it is all right. Do you think we shall be happy?”

Effie did not answer this question, but it haunted her for many days. Was she right to be glad that those two were to marry?

CHAPTER III.

“WELL, Effie, how do they get on together?”

Gerard Yonge and Effie were alone in the tiny study of the tiny house on Prior's Mount, Gateshill, to which Harold had brought his bride. Harold and Jessie could be seen strolling in the little garden, in the gloaming of a mild March evening.

Effie had often asked herself the question which Gerard now asked her. All had happened as Harold had planned. On the 12th of January he and Jessie had been quietly married at Glasgow—Mr. and Mrs. Caird, aunt Euphemia, Effie, and Gerard being all the wedding party. Harold and Jessie, after spending a month at Stirling, had returned to Gourock to fetch Effie, and the three had then proceeded to Gateshill, where they had now been established for more than six weeks. Gerard's arrival from Cambridge had been the first break in the monotony of their daily life.

"You must help me to make out, Gerard," was Effie's answer to the difficult question. "I cannot tell what to think. Harold seems quite satisfied; and Jessie is certainly improved—her spirits are less variable, and she does not think so constantly of her health."

"How is her temper?"

"Better, I think, altogether. We have not had more than one—no, two—really bad scenes since we came home. There was a terrible one at Gourock"—Effie hesitated, with a half laugh on her face.

"Come, out with it, little woman. What was it about?"

"About me—she thought the aunts were too sorry to part with me. But it was absurd that she should mind it; of course, when she had Harold to care for her, they thought more of me."

"Of course they thought more of you, little 'un, and would in any case, if the old ladies have any sense."

The blood rushed violently to Effie's face as Gerard looked affectionately at her.

"I say, Effie," Gerard continued, "whatever induced Hay to marry the Beauty?"

"Oh, Gerard, she *is* very beautiful."

"Of course she is—isn't she *the Beauty*? But what good is that? Her beauty won't prevent her leading him an awful life. Take my word for it,

Effie, she'll make him desperately miserable." The boy was quite solemn in his earnestness.

"Gerard, don't talk so ! It will break my heart if Harold is miserable ; and it is partly my fault that they married. I half persuaded her to accept him."

"She didn't care for him, then ?"

"Yes, she did. Yes, I really think she did—but she did not quite understand herself."

"I should think not. Who ever *did* understand her, and whom did she ever understand ? She is no more capable of appreciating dear old Hay than—than this chair is of appreciating me. But she *is* awfully beautiful. What a pity she should be such a demon !"

"Gay, don't ! She has some very good qualities ; she is so truthful, and so candid and forgiving."

"Yes, so she is. And she can be very agreeable. But she is so stupid. And what aggravates me more than anything is that she is so blind to Harold's virtues."

"Not more blind than Harold is to her faults."

"No ! he is utterly bewitched. He thinks her perfect. There never was such infatuation. Now if it had been you, small woman ! I say, pigmy, you'll be a capital little wife some day : I wonder what lucky fellow will get you. I suppose you wouldn't have such a good-for-nothing dog as I am ?"

“Cambridge has certainly not improved you, Gerard ! How absurdly you talk !”

“I want to talk seriously to you, really, Effie. Are those two likely to come in ?” He got up, and walked to the window : “No, they are sentimentalizing over slugs, and won’t stir yet.”

Gerard remained standing in the window, looking down at Effie, whose heart beat so violently that she feared he would see her dress tremble ; she hardly knew what she expected.

“I am awfully afraid that I’m getting all wrong. Somehow, I cannot keep out of debt, and—and *he*—daddie ” (Gerard’s voice sank nearly to a whisper) “always said debt was the beginning of everything bad. I know I *ought* to manage. There’s my scholarship ; and there’s the fifty pounds a-year that *he* left me ; and Harold gives me another fifty—it’s a shame that he should, dear old fellow, and I am a sneak to take it—but I should be in a worse muddle than ever without it. You see, fellows take notice of one, and are kind to one, and ask one to their rooms, and what’s a fellow to do ? It seems so bearish not to make any return. And then I don’t want to be thought a prig, or a sap, and if one doesn’t go out, and that sort of thing, one is sure to be set down for one or other of those objectionable animals. And so, you see, I’m going the pace, and *he* would have been so grieved, and it is such a shame after his sending me

to Eton and all; and I daren't tell Harold; and, Effie, dear little woman, tell me what I am to do!" He threw himself on the floor beside Effie, and looked beseechingly at her, his face flushed, and his bright eyes brimming over with tears. Effie's heart yearned over the poor, weak boy, with something of a mother's love, in spite of her being such a mere child herself.

"Could you not manage to draw in your expenses, and so gradually to pay your debts?"

"How can I? If I cut away at one end, the other will be growing all the time. Look here, if I were to determine to pay my tailor, I should have to leave some one else unpaid. What's the common saying? 'Rob Peter to pay Paul,' that's just what I should do."

"Then you really have not enough to manage with. Is there no way in which you could earn money?"

"I might take a tutorship in the holidays, but then I should never see anything of you all; and it would be such an awful bore. I am sure cramming small boys with the Latin grammar is not my vocation."

"Could not you make your drawings profitable? You are quite as clever as Harold in that way."

"No, you are wrong there, Effie: I am nothing of a draughtsman. I might do something, perhaps, if I were to study anatomy for a year or two, but I don't see how I could find time for that; and then if I am to take Orders, all the trouble would be thrown away."

“*If* you are to take Orders, Gerard !”

“Well, *as* I am to take Orders, then, little woman. Don’t be frightened, Effie ; I’m not flinching—I am not going to flinch from what daddie planned for me. I tell you what it is, Effie, I can’t be trusted by myself. I can’t go straight now I have not him to guide me.—There’s no help for it, I *must* run off the rails.”

“Oh, Gerard ! Papa told us to take care of you !”

“But you won’t, you see ; you have such a bad opinion of me ; you won’t have anything to do with such a scamp.”

“Don’t call yourself names, Gerard. You know you are not a scamp—and you know I am ready to do anything in the world for you.”

“Why don’t you promise to marry me, then ? You would be able to manage me if I belonged to you altogether.”

“How absurd to talk of marrying, Gerard, when we are both almost children !”

“Speak for yourself, little ’un. We are all ‘men’ at Cambridge. Then you positively won’t marry me, and I must wear the willow all my life. Harold,” he cried, as his brother pushed up the window, and came in, “Effie has gone and been and refused me, and my heart is shivered to atoms.”

As he spoke, Gerard pulled Effie’s little workbox towards him, and began to draw in the papered lid. In a few moments the box was decorated with a

spirited sketch of a woful swain, who was engaged in weaving for himself a willow wreath, whilst his scornful fair one—a ludicrous caricature of Effie—was retiring in the distance.

“Poor Effie!” cried Jessie, looking over Gerard’s shoulder. “What a shame!”

“It is the old conventional idea of Effie,” said Harold. “It has never changed at all since she was ten years of age.”

“When old Isaacs mistook her for ‘a dear little Hebrew,’” added Gerard, laughing. “I am sure there is nothing of the Jewess in this.”

“No,” said Effie, eagerly, “the nose is very much modified since then. I think the gradual ageing is shown with consummate skill in all Gerard’s portraits.”

“It *is* a shame!” cried Gerard, as he surveyed his own work.

“You never caricature *me*, Gerard,” remarked Jessie.

“It can’t be done,” said Gerard. “You have no salient points.”

“What a very inexpressive face I must have,” observed Jessie, looking highly gratified. however.

“Handsome people won’t caricature,” proceeded Gerard. “See how I always fail with myself.”

“Thank you, Gerard,” cried Jessie. “You are not often so complimentary.”

“Do you consider it a compliment that he classes you with himself?” asked Harold.

“Oh, yes,” returned Jessie, archly, “I know what a high opinion he has of his own appearance.”

“Of course Gerard knows he is good-looking,” said Effie, fiercely. “It would be as vain for him to think himself ugly as it would be for me to think myself beautiful.”

“You *are* beautiful, little one,” Gerard asserted.

“There is the proof,” said Effie, pointing to the caricature.

“It’s not a bit like you—when you call *me* good-looking.”

“Come, has no one got any compliment for me amongst all these fine speeches?” asked Harold, plaintively.

“Dear old face!” cried Gerard, looking up at his brother; “it’s the best I ever saw!”

“I think you might say the handsomest, Gerard,” said Effie.

“If it is true that ‘handsome is as handsome does,’” added Jessie.

Harold looked intensely delighted. “There! The best of all the complimentary speeches has fallen to my lot! Thank you, my darling wife.”

As the little family assembled at breakfast the next morning Gerard whispered to Effie, “There is a storm gathering.”

Effie glanced at her sister, and to her horror saw that Jessie's face was overspread with gloom. Harold, little observant of variable moods, which were unknown to his calm temper, saw nothing wrong, and was in high spirits, enjoying his brother's society. Gerard surpassed himself in fun and nonsense. Effie saw that Jessie ate nothing, and she awaited in trembling the inevitable moment when Harold should notice this circumstance. It soon came.

"Jessie, you are not eating. Have some of this cold chicken."

"No, thank you."

"You are ill, darling!"

"No."

"You must be ill, Jessie. I kept you in the garden too long last evening."

"Oh, no."

"Help yourself to some of that bacon."

"I am not hungry."

"My dearest wife! You must be ill!"

"Hear him, Jessie," cried Gerard. "He calls you his '*dearest* wife'—the villain has more wives than you."

"I hope the others are more agreeable to him," said Jessie, not smiling at all.

"My darling Jessie! Who could be more agreeable to me than you are?"

"It appears that every one is."

"Jessie! What *do* you mean?"

"You seem to prefer every one's society to mine."

"Society! What society but yours do I ever care about?"

Jessie did not answer.

"Do I seek any society away from home?" asked Harold again.

"Not away from home, perhaps."

"Then what would you have?"

"It is evident that *my* society is not enough for you at home."

"How evident? My dearest Jessie, I don't understand you in the least!"

"I dare say not. Nobody does. That is my misfortune."

"But what *do* you mean now? Whose society have I preferred to yours?"

"You always prefer Gerard's—and even Effie's."

"Gerard and Effie! My brother and sister! You surely are not jealous of them."

"Jealous! You always accuse me of being jealous!"

"Well, Jessie, what but jealousy could give you such groundless fancies?"

"Is it a 'groundless fancy' that you were almost out of your wits yesterday with delight at Gerard coming? that you could not tear yourself away from him for ten minutes in the garden last night? and

that you sat up with him till past twelve o'clock, although you knew how tired I was?"

"Whew! Is that it? Why, my dearest, I have not seen Gerard for two months, and I have you always, thank Heaven!"

"Yes, and 'familiarity breeds contempt.'—You would not once have shaken me off for Gerard. I knew how it would be. I knew you would soon be weary of me. It is always the case—nobody ever cares for me for long. I am the most miserable creature. I wish I were out of your way. I had better go and hide myself somewhere, so that you may none of you ever see me again. You would all be glad to get rid of me. But you won't have long to wait. I am not so strong as I was—and I can't stand all this worry—it will wear me out at last—I know it will. I feel that my constitution is sinking under it. One can't be so miserable—so miserable——" here Jessie fairly broke down, and sobbed passionately.

Harold was greatly distressed. He tried every means to soothe her, and at last led her from the room, still sobbing violently.

"There! I knew it was coming!" cried Gerard as soon as the door closed behind them.

"Oh, Gerard, it is too dreadful! Poor dear Harold! I quite hate Jessie when she worries him so."

"I shall strangle her if she goes on in this way,"

said Gerard. "And you say this is the third or fourth row since their marriage?"

"The third. How will it all end, Gerard?"

"If I were Harold I'd run away—to sea, or somewhere."

"But Harold would be miserable away from her, Gerard."

"I know he would, that is the mystery. What *can* make him like her? I suppose he thinks these fits of ill temper interesting sensibility. Well, I am glad she is gone. Now we can enjoy our breakfast. I say, Effie, I'm ravenously hungry. Isn't there anything more substantial in the house than these chicken bones? Here, cook!" he cried, walking to the top of the kitchen-stairs—"here, somebody! Help! Murder! Fire! Thieves! Quick! Give me something to eat—I'm starving!"

The servants came from different parts of the house, grinning broadly, and soon a meat-pie was produced which promised Gerard some satisfaction. Just as he was beginning to attack it, Harold returned. Gerard immediately rose, and, taking his brother by the arm, patted him soothingly on the back, saying as he did so, "Poor dear old boy, has he caught a Tartar?"

Effie could not help laughing, though she saw that Harold was distressed.

"I have persuaded her to lie down for a little

while," said Harold, gravely. "She is very much shaken—quite hysterical. It is terrible to see her so agitated," he added, sitting down by the table, and leaning his head on his hand. "I think I cannot treat her properly. I am afraid she is right in saying that I do not understand her. What can I do, Effie? How ought I to behave to her?"

"Flog her," muttered Gerard, with his mouth full of pie.

Harold looked at his brother angrily, almost for the first time in his life, and Effie hastened to say, "You can do nothing, Harold. She will come round, if she is left to herself."

"And then she will be penitent, and abuse herself," said Gerard.

Harold groaned. "That *coming round* is worse than all. It is so dreadful to hear her blame herself so bitterly."

"*I* rather enjoy that part," muttered Gerard to himself and his pie.

But when, after wandering about all day, looking like a very discontented ghost, Jessie came into the study where they were all sitting in the twilight, and it was evident that "that part" was coming, Gerard abruptly raised the window, and slipped into the garden. Poor Effie would have liked to follow him, but dared not.

"I am sorry Gerard should think it necessary to

avoid me," said Jessie. "But I dare say he is right—I am not a pleasant companion to any of you. I am very sorry for it. I am sure I wish I could be like other people. Do you think I ever shall be, Harold? I know I shall soon make you hate me. You do hate me, now!" she cried, vehemently, as Harold did not at once answer; "you cannot forgive what I said this morning. Oh, what shall I do if I lose you, the only friend I ever had?" And she began to sob again.

"My darling wife! You will never lose me. You must put up with my love for ever and ever, Jessie, for you will never get rid of it. And I would rather have you *not* like other people.—I would have you like yourself only, my own wife."

"You only say that to please me, Harold. You do not really think that I am better than other people."

"Better—ten thousand times—to me."

"I know I spoke very unkindly to you this morning. I am sure I wonder you can forgive me. *Do* you really forgive me, Harold?"

For all answer Harold took her in his arms with infinite tenderness.

"I am sure Gerard will hate me," Jessie began again, as soon as her husband released her; "I make the house miserable to him;—and Effie. I am very sorry, Effie. Will you kiss me, dear?"

Effie complied, and was delighted at the same moment to hear a visitor in the hall—a visitor whose

voice preceded her into the study as soon as the door was opened.

“ I beseech you, my kind friends, be so very indulgent as to imagine that I am not here in the body, but that this is my immaterial part—thirsting for a fresh supply of literary nourishment.” All this was poured out in a rapid stream, whilst the talker was approaching from the hall-door. As she entered the room she exclaimed, “ Thanks, oh, ye propitious shades of twilight, for the veil ye throw over my mantling blushes! No, really, Mr. Yonge, you are always so kind——but I dare not intrude upon a chair at this unseemly——and how is the lovely bride? Oh, envious pall of night that hides her blooming beauty from——and is that the fairy form of my little friend, Miss Effie? Ah, Mr. Yonge! Gallant as ever! But indeed I will not give up my treasures till——Miss Effie, on my honour, I have faithfully returned them all. This beautiful little set of Byron——ah! what a noble genius, but how sadly perverted! Don’t you agree with me, Mr. Yonge?”

“ To tell you the truth, Mrs. Mortlake——”

“ You would rather not discuss the subject before these sweet young ladies! A thousand pardons, Mr. Yonge! I bow to your superior—And here is our fascinating Christopher North! Here we need fear nothing to call a blush to the purest——ah! Mrs. Yonge, I am sure you feel with me that there is a freshness, a poetry

in these volumes—That tale of the mountain lovers, Miss Effie—what pathos! What touching simplicity and truth! I know you sympathize in my ardent admiration.”

“No, Mrs. Mortlake, I must confess——”

“True, quite true—it does overpass the bounds of pleasurable sensation—such a strain on our most tender feelings is more than——and ‘Smith’s Wealth of Nations,’——a truly valuable work——and ‘Coleridge’s Aids’——what a mind! what true philosophy! Ah, Mrs. Yonge, I feel sure that this is your frequent companion—there is in that lovely countenance, which is now so cruelly hidden from my longing eyes, a depth of thought and feeling that I know must instantly respond to this truly wonderful——now, Miss Effie, tell me, is not your sister a——she is too modest to confess the philosophic impeachment——”

“Indeed, Mrs. Mortlake, I don’t think——”

“I stand reproved, Miss Effie. I grovel in the dust before you, Mrs. Yonge. It was most indiscreet of me to pry into——No, Mr. Yonge, pray do not light the candles, or, after such an unpardonable breach of decorum, I must vanish into the dark abyss of——And here, last not least, is the exquisite little volume for which I can never sufficiently——Miss Effie, you remember that beautiful picture:—

‘Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands;
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.’

‘Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the chords with
might;
Smote the chord of self, that, trembling, pass’d in music out of sight.’

And this powerful apostrophe:—

‘Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength of youth!
Cursed be the social lies that warp us from the living truth!
Cursed be the sickly forms that err from honest Nature’s rule!
Cursed be the gold that gilds the straiten’d forehead of the fool!’

“I am ashamed to say, Mrs. Mortlake——”

“It is *I* who am ashamed, Miss Effie. You are quite right; with your usual delicate judgment you feel that ‘Locksley Hall,’ with all its sublimity, is not *quite* the poem for the youthful female——”

“No indeed, Mrs. Mortlake, I never——”

“I am wrong again: ‘*In vitium ducit culpæ fuga.*’ You are always right, Miss Effie. As you were about so appropriately to quote, ‘To the pure, all things are pure.’ But now I am sure that your favourite is that lovely little poem, the ‘May Queen.’

‘You must wake and call me early, call me early, mother dear;
To-morrow ’ll be the happiest time of all the glad New Year;
Of all the glad New Year, mother, the maddest, merriest day;
For I’m to be Queen o’ the May, mother; I’m to be Queen o’ the May.’

Then the touching contrast:—

‘If you’re waking, call me early, call me early, mother dear,
For I would see the sun rise upon the glad New Year.
It is the last New Year that I shall ever see,
Then you may lay me low i’ the mould and think no more of me.’

The poor May Queen takes your heart by storm,
I am sure, Miss Effie.”

“Yes, I thought that very——”

“Exactly; the most touching little scene from simple domestic——Mr. Yonge, have you seen Blackwood?”

“No; in fact, Mrs. Mortlake, I——”

“You don’t approve of it! There again I am falling into indiscretion. But the truth is—I must confess it, even at the risk of incurring your everlasting contempt—I shall positively expire—a hopeless victim to unsatisfied desire, unless I can obtain a glimpse of the article on——Your brother, Mr. Yonge?” as Gerard came in from the garden.

“Yes, my brother. Gerard, this is Mrs. Mortlake, a very kind friend of ours.”

“Spare me, Mr. Yonge; if you speak in such flattering terms, my emotions will be too much for——” the rest of the sentence was lost in an immense pocket-handkerchief.

“If you are Harold’s friend, Mrs. Mortlake, I wish you would persuade him to——”

“Oh, fie, Mr. Gerard! Oh, for shame! *There* is the persuasive angel who is to lead Mr. Yonge into all——give me air, give me air! I am ready to faint at the idea of your appealing to *me* to——”

“Only to make him pull down that horrid——”

“Now Mr. Gerard, I cannot hear another word. ‘That horrid’!

‘Procul, O, procul, esto profani;
Conclamat vates, totoque absistite luco.’

Do you, rash intruder into the joys of Paradise, dare so to designate anything presided over by the Queen of Beauty? I can endure no more. Mrs. Archer Yonge, allow the humblest of your admirers to do homage, and retire. Ah! now I have a glimpse! Blooming and sweet as ever, I see. Good-night, Miss Effie: would that those pale cheeks could borrow a little of——Good-night, Mr. Yonge. No, indeed you shall not—I cannot suffer it. I shall not wish *you* ‘good-night,’ Mr. Gerard; I will only wish you as much repose as your conscience will permit you, after speaking as——no, Mr. Yonge, really!—Oh, dear me! I have quite forgotten my need of mental sustenance. No, Miss Effie, not to-night; I must not be so indulged. It will be pleasure enough for to-night to think over all the wise and witty things with which my poor ears have so lately been enchanted.—Well, Mr. Yonge, if you will; but you run the risk of my fainting on the door-step with overmuch——Good-night.”

The instant Mrs. Mortlake left the room, Gerard seized a scrap of paper, and drew diligently, without saying a word, till Harold returned. Then he cried out,—“Harold, where did you pick up that prize? She’s worth her weight in gold ten times over. You don’t mean to say she lives next door! Why, what a charming house this is! I shall not go to Munro’s; I shall stay here all the vacation, please. There, Effie,—there she is.”

“For shame, Gerard,” cried Harold, laughing in spite of himself, as he looked over Effie’s shoulder at a capital representation of Mrs. Mortlake’s very peculiar appearance.

“Don’t destroy it, Gerard; I must keep it,” and Effie made an addition to her fast accumulating treasures.

CHAPTER IV.

"Oh, Jessie, do look! That smile was just like Harold's."

"You are as foolish as Harold," returned Jessie, "talking of his smile, when nurse said it was all fancy."

"Nurse said! that was three months ago!" cried Effie, indignantly. "He does really smile now, don't you, Baby?"

Baby was now the most important member of the little household. Having made his appearance with the snowdrops, he might fairly claim the credit of a real smile now that the pretty Gateshill lanes were fragrant with hawthorn. He was a fine, stout, healthy boy, who took life very philosophically, either sleeping placidly in his cradle, or, as at the present moment, kicking vigorously on the floor. His aunt was on her knees beside him, watching his every movement, whilst his mother looked down on him from an easy-chair, whenever her attention could

be drawn from the novel with which she was engrossed.

"Jessie, you *must* look at him. I'm sure he will have just Harold's eyes."

"I hope not. I hate such blue eyes for a man."

"I hate anything *but* blue eyes," returned Effie, vehemently. "I hope you are not going to have stupid brown eyes, Baby, like your mamma, and your aunt."

"My eyes are very much admired, Effie."

"So is the sphinx," returned Effie, viciously.

"I don't see the analogy," said Jessie, in a cool tone. "Harold, am I like the sphinx?" she added, as her husband entered the room with some papers in his hand.

"Yes, my beauty, so far as that the sphinx is the type of ancient perfection, and you are the type of modern."

"You are complimentary this morning, Harold," said Effie, rather disdainfully.

"You are benefiting by the fine things the critics have said of me."

"*I* am not benefiting. But what have they said?"

"First let me have a look at my boy. Well, young man, what do you think of the world in general? It seems to me that aunt Effie does not give you a chance of seeing much of the world beyond

a certain small face, with brown hair, brown eyes, and brown skin: I always find that face bounding your horizon, my son."

"Effie thinks brown eyes hideous, Harold," said Jessie, looking off her book for a moment.

"Does she? I think *some* brown eyes lovely."

"Baby will have blue eyes, won't he, Harold?" asked Effie, eagerly.

"I really am not sufficiently learned in babies to decide that question, Effie. I only hope, if such are your intentions, young sir, that you will copy your uncle Gerard's eyes, not those of your respected father."

"I want him to have your eyes, Harold," said Effie.

"That's kinder to me than to Baby. What does Jessie say?"

"Jessie is absorbed in that stupid novel," answered Effie.

"What is it about—the sphinx?" And Harold took the book out of his wife's hand.

"Don't, Harold! Now you have lost my place. How tiresome you are."

"There's your place, but I have some better reading here than any novel. I want you to listen to me. Listen, Baby. You'll hear how your father is to be a great man some of these days." Harold unfolded the paper he held, and began to read:

“ ‘ We are able to notice with decided approval two small companion pieces, entitled THE DAIRY-FARM FIELDS, and MILLSTREAM LANE, GATESHILL, the works of a young, and hitherto little-known artist, Mr. H. A. Yonge. There is a simplicity and purity in the treatment of these two subjects, which in this age of striving after meretricious effect is peculiarly refreshing. We venture to predict a successful career for one who has known how to give such true poetic feeling to these unpretending sketches of suburban fields and lanes.’ There, Jessie !” cried Harold, as he finished reading, “ sha’n’t we be proud of ourselves now ?”

“ What ?” asked Jessie, looking up with a bewildered air—“ what new wonder has he performed ? Has he spoken ? I should not be surprised if you two were to make that out soon.”

“ No,” said Harold, quietly ; “ we were not speaking of Baby. I was reading out a very favourable criticism on my pictures ; but I dare say it would not interest you.”

Harold was leaving the room with a heavy, *crushed* air which made Effie’s blood boil. “ Yes, Harold,” she cried, “ it would interest her—it *must* interest her ! Stop ! Come back ! Come and read it in her ears ! She *shall* hear it. Jessie, throw away that abominable novel ! How can you read that trash when you might be hearing words that would be music to any woman with one spark of feeling ?”

Beside herself with indignation at her sister's conduct, Effie seized the book out of her hand, and flung it through the open window into the garden. Harold stood at the door transfixed with amazement at this outbreak from the usually self-possessed Effie ; Baby, finding himself no longer the centre of attention, set up a loud shout ; and Jessie sprang to her feet in a passion of anger equal to Effie's.

"Harold, will you stand there and see me insulted in this manner?" she cried. "Make her beg my pardon this instant! Am I to submit to be treated so in my own house—and my own husband to stand by and smile?" Poor Harold was very far from smiling. "Will no one quiet the child?" he cried, in despair.

Effie, recalled to herself at once, took up the baby, and went through the open folding-doors into the other room. Jessie continued—"You always take her part against me. I suppose you would like me to beg *her* pardon for having been the cause of her violent excitement. I hope you see now that she has not such a sweet temper as people imagine. You see what I have had to put up with all my life."

"Effie does not often forget herself in this way," Harold at last put in.

"Oh, of course not! Effie does nothing wrong! It is *I* who have forgotten myself. *I* am always to blame. I cannot take up an amusing book for a

moment, in the hope of forgetting some of my troubles, but I am to be reproached and insulted as if I were guilty of a crime."

"What are your troubles, Jessie? Let me hear, that I may try to remedy them."

"How can you remedy them? If you had the least sympathy with me, you would not have to ask what my troubles are. And I married you that I might have some one to feel for me!"

"I am very sorry, Jessie, if I have disappointed you. I am sure I feel most acutely for any suffering of yours. But what is there now?"

"Everything!" said Jessie, now in her usual paroxysm of weeping. "Nobody cares for me, not even Baby. He likes you and Effie, and even Hannah, better than me. I have no friends, and I have no amusements—nothing to divert my mind; and yet you all know how bad it is for my mind to be allowed to prey upon my body. Of course I shall be ill after this. I was just feeling a little better, and now all my bad symptoms will come on again, and—and—I wish I was dead, and then you would all be satisfied."

"Jessie! Jessie! if you knew how wretched you make me when you speak in that manner!"

"Wretched! It is *I* who am wretched!" And she clasped her hands on her forehead and sobbed violently.

"Don't Jessie, pray! For Heaven's sake command yourself. You will frighten Baby."

"Baby! baby! Any one but me! Well, I will not injure your child. I will get out of his way, and yours too," and she flounced angrily from the room. Harold threw himself into a chair and groaned aloud.

Effie, hearing her sister leave the room, brought baby back and held him up to his father, without speaking. Harold stretched out his arms for the little fellow, and for a few minutes kept his face buried in the soft white frock.

"Effie, you must not be hard upon Jessie," he said at last.

"I am sorry I was so violent, Harold—it could do no good."

"Jessie is so sensitive," Harold continued, "that the least agitation upsets her completely. I am afraid she will be ill after this."

It was a proof that Effie's repentance was sincere that she punished herself by now holding her tongue. Harold went on: "It was very foolish and egotistical of me to insist on reading my news when I saw she was interested in her book. It is not often she is interested in anything, poor girl! I am afraid she has but a dull life of it—you must help me to try and make it a tranquil life, Effie."

"Why should she be dull, Harold? *You* are not dull."

"No—I have only too many objects in life. And here is this young fellow bidding fair to swallow them all up, are not you, Baby?"

"Jessie has him, too," remarked Effie.

"If you remember, Effie—I was recalling it to mind the other day—Jessie never liked children; she always said so."

"But her own, Harold!"

"I dare say it will be different when he is older. She can hardly realise being a mother yet."

Effie said nothing, and, after a short pause, Harold continued: "I hope, if I get on pretty well, that in a few years we may be able to move to a larger house, nearer town, and then we shall have more society. It is selfish in me, because I am poor, and ambitious, and shy, to make a recluse of one who is so eminently fitted for intercourse with the world. You never saw her at a party, Effie: you cannot picture to yourself the brilliancy of her beauty when animated by dancing and gay conversation. I wish I could reconcile it to my conscience to launch out at once, and take her to all the parties within my reach."

"You, who hate parties, Harold!"

"Come, Effie, I am not such a selfish monster as all that. I *could* make some sacrifice for her, who has sacrificed so much for me."

"Yes—giving up the life with the dear old aunts

at Gourock was an immense sacrifice to Jessie, certainly," said Effie, satirically.

Harold looked first mystified, and then rather hurt. "Of course that life would not have lasted, Effie. She would soon have married."

"Dr. Lang it must have been, then," replied Effie.

"Well, we need not discuss that matter. She *has* married me, poor girl, and the only question now is, how I can make her life a little less monotonous."

"You will be able to plunge into all sorts of dissipation when your 'successful career' commences," said Effie, cheerfully.

Harold shuddered. "I hate the recollection of that critique," he said. And then he quietly laid the baby in Effie's arms, stepped into the garden to pick up the maltreated novel, and left the room with it.

Effie continued for some time to walk about with baby, who was restless, and refused to lie down in his cradle. She had seated herself by the garden-window, and was warming his little feet in the sun, when there came a low, quick ring at the gate-bell, and a minute afterwards the front window was softly raised, and a well-known step crossed the room.

"Gerard!" cried Effie, not rising, for her legs trembled too much, and baby was an excuse for sitting still.

"Yes. Are you glad?" asked Gerard, as he took her hand.

"Of course I am. But what brought you?"

"Why should I not come? I was turned out at Weymouth, and I did not care about going to Earle's just now. I mean to spend the rest of the vacation here. I've got lots to tell you, little woman."

"About yourself? Why were you turned out of Mr. Monro's?"

"They gave up the house at Weymouth, and have gone back into Norfolk. I say, is that the infant phenomenon? Halloa! old fellow, how are you?"

"He seems to approve of you, Gerard—how he stares!"

"Look here, old fellow, what's your name? By-the-by, has he any name?"

"He has not been christened yet. Harold wants you to be one of the godfathers."

"I! Oh no, I couldn't possibly! There are all sorts of dreadful responsibilities to undertake."

Effie smiled, but rather seriously. "Well," she said, "you must hear what Harold has to say."

"Not if he is likely to say anything to induce me to make rash promises," cried Gerard, in a tone of alarm. "But you haven't told me the young shaver's name yet."

"David," answered Effie in a low voice.

Gerard did not speak for a minute, then he said, "I thought of that; but I hoped they might not choose it."

"So did I," said Effie, "but they both wished it."

There was a long pause, which was broken by Gerard saying, in quite an altered tone, "Does he like apples?"

"Apples!" cried Effie, aghast.

"Yes. I've brought half a dozen for him. Here they are," and he pulled a bag out of his coat-pocket. "Here, old fellow, catch!" Baby grasped one side of the apple in his little fat fingers, and immediately conveyed it and Gerard's hand to his mouth, much to his uncle's delight.

"There, I thought so! I knew he was a man of taste!"

"Take it away, Gerard, pray!" cried Effie.

"Why? See how delighted he is with it. Depend on it nature dictates what food is good for him."

"Nonsense. He will hurt himself, Gerard. See, he is knocking his mouth with it! Do take it away."

"You ungrateful little girl! When I have taken the trouble to carry them in my pocket all the way from Covent Garden."

"Present them as an offering to Jessie; she will appreciate them more than Baby can."

"No, I sha'n't, I shall present them to you. Here!" And he rolled the six apples into Effie's lap, much to her discomfort, and not a little to Baby's.

"What are you doing to his feet?" asked Gerard,

when he had watched the apples roll off into different corners of the room.

“Warming them,” replied Effie.

“*You* can’t warm them!” cried Gerard, with supreme disdain. “His foot is as large as your hand! Here, shy him over to me. I’ll soon warm his feet.”

Effie did not comply.

“Effie, I say, give him to me.”

Still she was obdurate.

“I’m his uncle, as much as you are his aunt. I demand my rights. Hand him over instantly, small woman.”

“I am afraid,” said Effie, hesitating.

“Now, Effie, don’t be absurd—as if I should not be as careful as you can possibly be. Do trust me—that’s a good little woman.”

Effie could resist no longer, so Baby was transferred to Gerard, who quite proved his right to be trusted with the precious charge, and acted as nurse with great satisfaction to himself and his two companions, till the real nurse arrived to claim her child. As Baby was carried out Harold and Jessie entered, the latter without the slightest trace of her recent emotion.

“This is a very pleasant surprise, Gerard,” she cried. “I have been worrying Harold as usual, and I am so glad you have come to make amends to him. Effie, dear,” she added, going up to her sister, “I was very wrong just now, will you forgive me?”

Effie did not feel that such wrongs were to be wiped out by a few penitent words, but she could only receive and return the proffered kiss, and hope that the peace thus restored might be lasting. Gerard drew other hopes from these amicable signs. "I seem to have come in at the fag-end of a battle-royal," he cried, "just in time for the celebration of peace. But whoever heard of rejoicings with a bare table? Though I am rather tired, Harold, I don't mind getting up to ring the bell." He suited the action to the words, and then said, "Don't mind me, Jessie. Give your orders just as if I were not by." Then, pretending to be absorbed in meditation, he muttered aloud, "Cold lamb and salad—a pint of Bass—gooseberry-tart and cream—not bad for a mild spring day. Or a tender young chicken, and a nice fresh dish of asparagus—or if there *should* be such a thing as a raised pie in the house—or a piece of cold boar's head—or a *pâté de foie gras*—a *pâté*, or two, I mean—or——"

"Well, what do you want, Gerard?" asked Jessie, as a servant answered the bell: "we dine at six, and it is three now."

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Gerard, with an affected start. "I was plunged in meditation on the probable bearing on the mean ratio of human happiness, of the hydrostatic forces of the solar system. What do I want? The merest trifle—a crust

and a worm—anything will content me—contentment with a frugal mind—Hoigh! Jane, stop! What is there in the larder?”

“A round of cold beef, sir, and a piece of bacon, and a meat-pie, and a jam-tart, and I don’t know what else, I am sure.”

“Bring it all up, and ask cook to broil half a dozen rashers of bacon, with a few eggs—all the rest will do as it is. Only be quick. Tell cook not to mind the dinner—*that* can be put off.”

When the contents of the larder had appeared, and disappeared, Gerard walked into the garden, and called Effie to him. “I want your sympathy, and your advice, and your everything, Effie. I have been longing to see you. I did not like to write about it. What do you think? I am in love!”

Gerard looked down into Effie’s face triumphantly as he said this. Fortunately, Effie had so schooled herself to expect such an announcement some day, that the slightest possible loss of colour was her only sign of emotion.

“Are you, really?” she said. “And with whom?”

“How horribly straightforward and unromantic you are, Effie, with your nasty, correct accusative cases! It isn’t a ‘whom’ at all. Rules of grammar only apply to mortals.”

“Well with *what*, then; is that better?”

“With an angel—a creature much too celestial for this earth.”

“And what is her——what is *its* name?”

“*Name!* Names are for mortals; to me she is light, life, love, meat, drink, sleep, air, water, hope, happiness; are not those names enough? If to others she is differently known, *I* care for no other titles.”

“You are very absurd, Gerard.”

“But seriously, Effie, I am desperately in love. Her name is Lilian Home; she is just eighteen, tall and fair, with soft languishing blue eyes, and softer flaxen curls; her father is a savage old general, and her mother an awful old tartar. We used to meet every day; we walked together, we rode together, we danced together, and we were sea-sick together; she let me call her by her Christian name, and she gave me a piece of ribbon; and oh, Effie, tell me, do you think she will ever marry me?”

“You have not asked her, then?” said Effie.

“Asked her! How could I? The old general would have kicked me down stairs, and the she-tartar would have thrown me out of window. She’s awfully rich, you see, that’s the bore, and I haven’t got a penny, except fifty pounds a-year, and what poor dear old Harold gives me. I say, Effie! what a brick he was to add that thirty!”

“You are not to say a word about it, you know!” cried Effie, in a tone of alarm.

“I know—but why? Doesn’t Jessie know of it?”

“No,” replied Effie, faintly.

Nor did Harold know of it. Effie, for the first time in her life, had been guilty of a deception. Mr. Garnock had left each of his children fifty pounds a-year, and Effie, after hearing of Gerard’s college-troubles, had determined to spare more than half of her share, sending it to Gerard in such a manner that he should attribute the generosity to his brother.

“Well, you see,” said Gerard, returning to the subject of his love, “I can’t go to the general, and say, ‘Please, sir, I’ve got fifty pounds a-year of my own, and my brother gives me eighty pounds more, and may I marry your daughter?’ But what else can I do? Shall I try a rope ladder?”

“Would the young lady agree to that plan?”

“I am not sure. She would like the fun of it; and then she’s very proud of her feet, and it would be a capital chance of showing them.”

“But would she be willing to share your poverty?” asked Effie, unable to help viewing the whole matter in a rather more serious light than Gerard did.

“No, she would not like poverty at all.”

“Then you can only wait a few years—till you have made your way in the world.”

“A few years! She will be married in less than a year. There was a brute of a captain, with red whiskers, always dangling after her.”

“Would she not wait for you?”

“Not she. Why she won’t wait even for a bathing-machine.”

“Then she can’t care for you!” cried Effie.

“No, I don’t think she can. But what ought I to do, Effie?”

“Work on,” said Effie, earnestly, “and hope that constancy will meet with its due reward.”

“But suppose I should not be constant?”

“Then you don’t care for her.”

“Oh yes, I do. I tell you I am desperately in love. But you have such frightfully sublime views on these matters. If ever you are in love, Effie, how awfully hard you’ll do it. I say, don’t you think dinner must be ready?”

CHAPTER V.

“PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

“The Oaks, July 20th.

“MY DEAR EFFIE,

“Congratulate me! She has sent me the dearest little pink note. The sight of it made me so all-overish that I thought I should have been obliged to have a hot bath, to restore the circulation. If I write too medically it is Kent’s fault, and if I write too theologically it’s Munro’s. It is awfully dangerous to be shut up alone with two fellows, each with a rampant hobby-horse. But to return to our muttons—that is, to my dear little lamb of a pink note. During that blissful fortnight—out on that word! to me it was unmixed day—during that *fortday*, then, she asked me to get her some autographs. Now, I had not the slightest idea how to procure any autographs worth having—except my own; but, if she had asked me to get her half an ounce of light, of course I should not have owned to any inability to

satisfy her. So directly I went up I set to work, and made myself the *black beast* of all the men I met. By the end of term I was avoided as though I were plague-stricken; I had no sooner entered a room than I was alone in it; and men who wanted to save their wine had only to give a hint that they expected me. But I succeeded in collecting half a dozen autographs, and I have my reward. It is too precious to part with—it lives between my shirt and my waistcoat on the left side, where Kent says my heart is—but I will copy it word for word: ‘My dear Mr. Yonge’—I think that ‘My’ looks well—she need not have said more than ‘Dear Mr. Yonge.’ ‘Many, many’—only one ‘many’ was necessary, so that’s another good sign—‘thanks for your very valuable addition to my collection of autographs. I assure you I prize them most highly’—may not that be a delicate way of saying she prizes them for my sake?—you know she could not say that outright. ‘I hope you will some day ask me to do something for you in return’—isn’t that rather giving me an opening to ask her to marry me? ‘Papa and mamma beg to be very kindly remembered to you’—I’m sure the two old savages wouldn’t beg to be kindly anythinged, but it looks well that she should say so, doesn’t it? But the end is the best. ‘I hope you have not forgotten our pleasant fortnight at Weymouth. I shall never forget it.’ That’s

rather strong, isn't it? That is all, except that she remains mine sincerely. I wish sincerely that she were mine!—'Lilian Home.' Now what do you think of it? Write directly, and give me your candid opinion. I have an immense respect for your judgment in these matters.

"We are getting on very well here, excepting that I live in continual dread that Kent will dissect me in the ardour of his professional zeal, and that Monro will be a willing accomplice, for the sake of the practice in reading the burial-service. He, George Monro, and I are going over to Eton on Election Saturday; his father and mother, and brothers and sisters are to meet us. One or two of them—the brothers—are there.

"Give my love to Hay and the Thunderess, and to my godson. I say, are any more of my duties coming on yet? Any more plate? Or have I anything to do with his teething? When is the Catechism to begin? Mind you warn me when any of my promissory notes fall due. And believe me to remain,

"Your affectionate Friend,

"G. ARCHER YONGE."

Effie read out to Harold and Jessie the public parts of this letter, which she received at the breakfast-table.

"I am glad Gay has written," said Harold. "I was beginning to wonder what had become of the boy."

"I suppose he has been reading too hard to write much," said Effie, but she hardly thought it.

"Is Election Saturday this week?" asked Harold. "Yes, to be sure it is. Well, young women, I have a proposal to make. You have neither of you ever seen anything of the sort. Let us go down to Slough early on Saturday; take up our quarters at the inn at Salthill; leave our young encumbrance there; go over to Eton, and see the fun; have a quiet day on Sunday; and come home on Monday morning. What do you say?"

"That you are a man of genius—a most promising young artist, and a dear, good old hubby," cried Jessie, ecstatically.

"That it would be very pleasant," said Effie, calmly, though a bright flush had overspread her face.

"We'll say nothing to Gerard about our plan," said Harold.

The plan was carried out to the letter, as Harold's plans generally were; it must have been a tough obstacle which would have turned him from a purpose once formed. When Effie, whose sleep had been very light and disturbed, peeped out of window at dawn on the Saturday, a cloudless sky, and a sheet of dew over the grassplot gave promise of a brilliant

day. At nine they started, all in high spirits ; even Baby seemed to know that this was no ordinary drive in the lumbering fly which conveyed them to Paddington. At the station Effie's heart began to beat tumultuously. The platform was crowded with old Etonians, and in every one that approached she expected to recognize Gerard. It was the same at Slough, and she was quite glad of the little bit of calm when they turned off to shady Salthill. Here they saw Baby comfortably settled, and then proceeded across the fields to Eton. Effie felt quite at home here ; she knew the neighbourhood so well from Gerard's various narrations of "jolly walks," when a master had been cleverly "shirked ;" "first-rate rides"—the grandest of exploits to an Eton boy—or still more exciting steeple-chases. She was so interested in finding out the different landmarks, especially near the College, that she had forgotten the chance of an unexpected meeting, when suddenly Harold came to a full stop. The street was crowded, and immediately in front of them stood Gerard, with a very pretty girl leaning on his arm. A spasm of dread shot through Effie ; this was Lilian, and they should interrupt his pleasure ! It did not seem like it, however, by the glad way in which Gerard cried out, "Harold, you here ! Whatever—and Jessie, too, and Effie—by all that's jolly ! What a capital idea ! What *did* put it into your heads ? Monro, here ! Where are you ? This is

my brother, and these are my sisters—or something very like it. My friend *Monro*, and this is *his* sister. Mrs. *Monro*, let me introduce my brother, and my sister-in-law, and her sister—*Effie*! Where have you disappeared to? Mr. *Monro*, you have heard me speak of my brother—*Harold*, Mr. *Monro*. And this is Miss *Kate Monro*, and here are *Ned*, and *Harry*, and *Charlie*. And now I think I have done my duty, and everybody knows everybody. It is immensely jolly to see you all.”

There had been a general clamour—all talking at once, and all bowing confusedly to one another; but *Effie* had heard nothing but *Gerard*’s voice, and seen nothing but his pleased face. She was relieved that it was not *Lilian Home* with whom he was walking.

“Of course you will join our party now,” continued *Gerard*, directly he had recovered a little breath after his introductions. “How shall we mix?”

Mr. Monro, a gallant old gentleman of the *Sir Roger de Coverley* school, immediately offered his arm to *Jessie*.

“If you take my lady, sir, you must give me yours,” said *Harold*, securing *Kate Monro*, a merry girl of fourteen.

“Come, *Effie*!” cried *Gerard*, “I have another arm, and you must belong to me.”

“Let me go to one of the boys,” said Miss *Monro*. “You must have so much to say to your sister.”

"Indeed, I shall not—we have no secrets to talk of. Where were you making for, Effie? We are going to the Playing-fields."

"That is just where I wish to go," answered Effie.

"Have you never been at Eton before, Miss Yonge?" asked Miss Monro.

"What, after all my trouble, you call her by a wrong name! That is too bad, Miss Monro! This is Effie Garnock—she is not my sister, really. She is my sister-in-law's sister. I don't know what relationship that is—excepting that it is a very pleasant one," and he gave a slight pressure to Effie's hand, which lay on his arm.

"Yonge!" cried George Monro, "you might spare me Clara, now that you have got so good a substitute for her."

"How greedy you parsons are!" returned Gerard, "you have got Mrs. Monro. What else do you want?"

"Why do you say 'you parsons,' Gerard?" asked Effie. "Mr. Monro is no more a *parson* than you are, is he?"

"George Monro! He is a parson from the top of that tall hat of his to the lowest nail in his charity-boots, and from the tip of one beaver glove to the other, taking in the most remote corners of the indigent tailor's handiwork."

"You traitor!" cried George Monro, "to expose all the weak points in my outer man!"

"That is right, Gerard!" exclaimed Mrs. Monro at the same moment: "I wish you could laugh him out of some of his foolish fancies."

"I hope you will not, Mr. Yonge," said Clara. "Miss Garnock, do you think that self-denial, and zeal, and liberality deserve to be called 'foolish fancies'?"

"Certainly not," replied Effie, rather confused by the other's warmth. "Oh, how beautiful those old trees are!" she exclaimed, by way of a diversion.

"Are they not?" said Gerard; "I knew you would like this."

"It makes me so angry," Clara continued, "that papa and mamma will persecute George. I call it nothing less than persecution to try and worry people out of their conscientious scruples and convictions."

"You are quite right, Miss Monro," said Gerard, earnestly. "George is a noble fellow, and I only wish I had some of his high principles. But Mrs. Monro was only in fun."

"I know mamma would not be intentionally unkind, but neither she nor papa can understand that George is no longer a child. They do not seem to me to *respect* him as they ought. You know, having been away so long, I see my home with the eyes of a stranger, and so I sometimes speak in a very undutiful manner; don't you think so, Miss Garnock?"

"I confess I was rather startled," replied Effie, candidly.

"You must not expect polite denials from Effie," said Gerard. "She always tells the naked truth—and awfully naked it is sometimes; it cuts through all one's pretty pretences, scatters all one's pet delusions, and leaves one hopeless, surrounded by the ruins of all one's favourite air-castles. Oh! beware of her, Miss Monro, she is a most ruthless little woman. You would not believe there could be so much venom in so small a compass."

"I will not believe that there is any venom in Miss Garnock," said Clara, courteously.

"Wait till you have tried her. You just tell a lie, pick a pocket, or rob a church, and you will soon feel her sting."

"I hope I may never try her in that way," returned Clara, laughing. "Have you often done so, Mr. Yonge?"

"Not quite literally, perhaps; but just as bad. I say, Harold, have you got a carriage for Surley?"

"No; can't we have a boat?"

"We are going by the road. And I doubt whether you will find a boat, now."

"Shall we find a carriage?"

"I must make haste and hunt for one," Gerard replied. "Shall I leave you here, or shall we all walk that way?"

"I think we shall have had quite walking enough," said Mrs. Monro. "Edward, where are you striding away to, as if you were a young man?"

"You need not concern yourselves about us—Mrs. Yonge and I will be back by the time luncheon is ready," replied the old gentleman.

Harold followed his wife, and the boys followed him, but the rest of the party turned townwards.

"Should you like a boat best, Effie?" asked Gerard.

"I like the water, but I don't think Jessie would; and I dare say it will be better to have a carriage."

"Would *you* have liked the water, Miss Monro? Monro said his mother would prefer the road. But our party might divide—there is no reason why some of us should not row."

"That would be very nice," said Clara. "But would it be possible to get a boat now?"

"I will see what can be done. What would our number be? If Mr. and Mrs. Monro will take Jessie and Harold, there will be you and Effie and Kate for sitters, and George, Harry, and I to pull, and Ned to steer—no, by-the-by, Ned will be in the boats—I suppose Charlie couldn't steer? We must make Kate coxswain. You are sure you would like a boat, Miss Monro?"

"Oh, yes."

"I say—it seems so stupid to be calling you 'Miss

Monro'—I call all the others by their Christian names—Mayn't I call you Clara?"

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Yonge."

"But then you mustn't call me 'Mr. Yonge.' All the others call me 'Gerard.'"

"Very well—I like the name of Gerard."

"Effie, is it not strange—I am quite like a brother with all the rest, and I never saw—Clara"—he hesitated, coloured, and laughed—"till the other day?"

"Ycu have been away from home, Miss Monro?"

"Yes, I was for two years at school in Paris, and for two more in Italy with my uncle and aunt. It was a long time to be away. When I left, my brother George was a boy like Ned, and when I came back I found him a man of whom I felt quite afraid."

"One does feel afraid of George sometimes," said Gerard, "he is so tremendously good."

"But he is not in the least censorious," said Clara.

"Oh, no—nor even strait-laced," replied Gerard; "and I suppose a clergyman-elect ought to be super-good."

"This is the second time that you have spoken as if *you* were not also a clergyman-elect, Gerard," remarked Effie.

Gerard hesitated.

"You intend to take Orders, do you not, Mr. Yonge?" asked Clara.

“I—I hardly know,” replied Gerard. “You have asked me an awkward question, Miss Monro. The fact is, I don’t feel at all fit to be a clergyman, but I dare not say I don’t mean to take Orders, for Effie would think me the basest, meanest, most fickle, and most contemptible deserter that ever disgraced his colours. And I have other reasons for shrinking from giving up the idea, as much as I shrink from carrying it out,” he added, in a low, serious tone. There was a long silence, broken at last by Gerard exclaiming, “There’s Joyce! If any one can manage to get a boat for us, he’s the man! Just take care of these ladies, George,” and he ran off, to reappear at luncheon with the welcome news that the powerful Joyce had prevailed, and a boat was at their service.

“Are you sufficiently acquainted with the river to venture on such an occasion as this?” asked Mr. Monro, nervously.

“Oh yes, sir; George and Harry and I all know the river as well as we know your pond.”

“But knowing the river under ordinary circumstances, and getting safely through the confusion of such a scene as this, are very different things. You young people must do as you like; but I consider it a most dangerous experiment.”

“Come, Edward, we had better get on,” said Mrs. Monro. “Is there anything wholesome coming, George?”

“Why, Mrs. Monroe!” cried Gerard, laughing, “what would you have more wholesome than that eel-pie, or that lobster-salad? We ordered the salad on purpose for Mr. Monroe.”

“Edward! Take care what you are about!” exclaimed Mrs. Monroe. “You had better take just the inside of one of those meat patties. Is this the kind of trash you boys generally live on? No wonder George complains of headache, and Harry has a complexion like a turnip.”

“Mamma!” cried the insulted youth.

“Never mind your mother, boys,” said Mr. Monroe. “This is an excellent pie, George. But where’s the champagne? I must have a glass with Mrs. Archer Yonge.”

“It is too bad of you people not to eat,” said Gerard, “it makes us all seem so greedy. Can’t you forget that feed at Salthill? My theory is that one meal should never interfere with another. Am I not right, Mr. Monroe?”

“Mother, do try your eloquence on Mr. and Mrs. Yonge. Gerard and I will be in despair if our spread is treated so disdainfully,” said George Monroe.

“I think Mr. and Mrs. Yonge and Miss Garnock are the only wise people of the party. We should all have done much better to follow their example. Edward, let us go down now, and see if the carriage is ready.”

"My dear, I am not ready for the carriage. I must have some of those stewed eels. Mrs. Yonge, another glass of champagne? To our next meeting!"

"Mrs. Monro hopes that may be far distant, if such meetings are always to be celebrated in champagne," said Gerard.

"Now, do see if the carriage is ready, Ned," implored Mrs. Monro.

"We have only a chaise with two seats, Mrs. Yonge," said Mr. Monro. "I hope you will not object to it. Does your husband drive?"

"You will drive, Mr. Yonge, will you not?" asked Mrs. Monro, hastily.

"Oh certainly, if you wish it."

"Somehow, I don't think my people have much confidence in my charioteering skill," said Mr. Monro. "Now, then, are we all ready to start?"

The start of the chaise was satisfactorily accomplished, Harold driving, with Mrs. Monro by his side, and Jessie sitting behind with Mr. Monro. The two couples managed to make themselves so agreeable to each other that, although they never got near the tables, and could not obtain a good view of the boats, they were perfectly satisfied with their evening, and when they all met again at the "Christopher," maintained that their enjoyment had been quite equal to that of the boating-party. Effie said nothing, but she thought many times that evening that no earthly

enjoyment could be equal to hers. After the excitement of the crowd at Surley, and the rapid row back, there came a moment of delicious calm, when all the boats lay moored by the banks, or only drifted along the stream, waiting for the commencement of the fireworks. Gerard was the stroke-oar, and therefore engrossed the two sitters, but Effie noticed with surprise and intense pleasure that he made more frequent demands on her attention than on that of Clara. It was the first time she had had any opportunity of seeing Gerard with any other girl, and instead of the pain she had often feared such an opportunity might bring, she experienced almost unmixed pleasure—not quite unmixed, however, for not even Gerard could make her enjoy the fireworks.

The Monroes were to sleep at Eton. Gerard had intended to do the same, but he now declared his intention of going to Salthill, and being domestic for a day. So the Yonges packed comfortably into the Monros' chaise—Gerard driving, with Effie by his side, and Harold and his wife behind, Jessie being afraid to face the night air.

“I did not answer your letter, Gerard,” said Effie, as soon as they got out of Eton, “because I thought I should see you soon, and could talk about it more comfortably.”

“Oh, ah! I wrote to you about Lilian's pink note. Wasn't it a queer composition?”

"No, I did not think it anything peculiar. To be as unpleasant as usual, Gerard, I did not think she wrote either more or less than any girl might have done under the circumstances."

"No? Well, I dare say not. It was all the better for being copied, she writes such a horrid scrawl. I will show it to you some day."

"You can show it to me to-morrow," observed Effie.

"No, I can't, for I left it at Banstead. The fact is, I found it awkward to have it loose about me, so I put it in my waistcoat-pocket, and I changed my waistcoat in a hurry just as I was leaving, and so forgot it."

Effie said nothing, meditating on the nature of a love which left its treasures in a cast-off waistcoat-pocket.

"I say, Effie," began Gerard again, "what do you think of Clara Monro?"

"I like her very much indeed. She is sweetly pretty."

"Is not she? She is prettier than Jessie, I think, though Jessie looked splendid to-day; and how agreeable she was! But Clara wins on one so. You will think her prettier still the next time you see her."

"She and her brother are very much alike."

"Yes. George is a splendid fellow. I think he is the handsomest man I ever saw."

"He is very good-looking. Both he and his

sister have such refined features, and so much expression—at least, such refinement of expression. Those long eyes always make a face interesting to me.”

“Hurrah, Effie! I believe you are smitten with George. He would make a capital husband. And he admires you very much. He was quite angry with me for suggesting that your style of beauty is not generally recognised as such. He says there is something quaint and elfish about you which strikes his fancy much more than regular beauty; and then he talked some nonsense about a sylph-like form, which I sha’n’t repeat, for fear of making you vain. But I must say, little woman, that is an awfully jolly get-up of yours. I don’t think Clara dresses well. But I like her immensely. I am not sure that she is not better than Lilian; at any rate, she is much more intellectual. I must confess that Lilian has about as much mind as a pretty doll. What do you think of the old people?”

“I like Mrs. Monro extremely. She looks so kind, and she is so original.”

“Yes. Oh, she is great fun. And the old gentleman is very well in his way, only he is rather fidgetty.”

They were bowling along the smooth Slough road all too rapidly to please Effie, who could not get up her courage to say what she had determined should

be said during that drive. At last she forced out the words: "I was sorry to hear what you said about taking Orders, Gerard; but I think you are quite right."

"Do you, really?" cried Gerard, turning round to her with eager delight.

"I should be the last person to wish you to take Orders if you feel unfit for it," Effie continued. "I am certainly disappointed, because I had always thought of you as a clergyman. But I would much rather respect you for refusing to be a lukewarm clergyman, than see you what I must despise."

"I don't want you to despise me, Effie. I have dreaded telling you of my scruples on that account. I know I am terribly weak. I never seem able to make my anchors hold. But I don't think I could be a hypocrite. And I could not bear to desecrate an office which I have seen filled as we used to see it. You understand what I feel, Effie?"

"Perfectly. But, Gerard, I wish you would not think yourself so weak. There is strength, not weakness, in these scruples of yours, if you could but see it."

"Thank you, Effie. That is the first pat on the back I ever got from you. I ought to go right with you to hold me up on one side, and George Monro on the other, and Harold pushing behind. But I shall slip down in spite of you all—you see if I don't.

Here we are, and I wish we weren't ; I could drive on like this all night."

Effie, also, had thought the drive by moonlight most delightful. But she still more enjoyed strolling with Gerard in the shady garden of the hotel, after their late breakfast the next morning.

"How jolly this is!" cried Gerard. "What a capital idea it was of Harold's to bring you all here!"

"Harold always has such excellent ideas," replied Effie. "How delicious this garden is!"

"Yes. It is much better than being in Eton. And it is better to be with you, little woman, than with the Monroes."

"Oh, you humbug!" cried Effie.

"No, really, Effie, it is not humbug. I like them all very much, and I should have had a very pleasant day with them. But, somehow, I always feel better—a better boy, I mean—with you than with any one else."

"Better with me than with Mr. Monroe?"

"Yes, I think so. You see, with George I daren't go wrong ; but with you I don't feel inclined to go wrong."

"Again, Gerard? When will you learn to walk alone?"

"Never. I shall always want you to walk with me."

Effie did not answer this.

"Don't you think Sunday is always pleasanter than any other day?" Gerard continued, after a pause. "I mean the whole thing—the air, and the sky, and all the sounds and scents. Do you remember the Sundays at Pixycombe?"

"Remember them, Gerard! It seems to me that Pixycombe must have been Paradise."

"I have just the same feeling about it. Do you remember the look of the little church on such a summer's morning as this? By-the-by, had we not better go to church this morning?"

"Yes, to be sure. Thank you for reminding me. Do you know, Gerard, I am afraid I am beginning not to care about church."

"Ah! You want George Monro to keep you in order. Run away now, and put on your things. There is only just time to get there."

"I wish I had not been such a good boy this morning," said Gerard, as he and Effie came out of church. "It always upsets my temper for the whole day, when I hear a man going on like that for an hour—yes, let me see"—looking at his watch—"actually for an hour and five minutes. And what possible good can he have done to any one of his hearers? With me he has just undone all the good of the prayers—which, fortunately, he could not spoil. He has answered a string of questions that nobody ever thought of asking; and filled our minds with

doubts which would never have got into them without his help. Bah! It makes me so savage!"

"So it seems," said Effie. "But you need not revenge yourself by kicking the dust all over me."

"Did I? Poor little woman! Puff!"—blowing away an imaginary obstruction—"There, now he is gone, and we won't think of him again. Only I must not forget to give George my views on the subject."

"You can do so at once, then," said Effie, "for here he comes."

"We are only just out of church, and you have had time to walk from Eton!" cried Gerard, as George Monro and his two younger brothers came over a stile into the road.

"I hope we did not knock you up yesterday, Miss Garnock?" said George.

"No, nothing knocks her up," answered Gerard, for Effie: "She's 'a bad 'un to look at, but a good 'un to go.' How do you all get on without me?"

"Very badly," said Ned, "so we have come over to look after you."

"Why do you allow him to be so rude, Miss Garnock?" asked George, referring to Gerard's last observation. "I wish you would accept me as your champion, and let me chastise him."

"Come on!" cried Gerard, defiantly.

"I thought you were a man of peace, Mr. Monro," said Effie.

“ I could fight in a good cause,” returned George, skilfully appropriating Effie to himself as he spoke.

This appropriation continued throughout the day, much to Effie’s vexation, though she could not but confess to a great want of taste in preferring Gerard’s boyish nonsense to George’s really intellectual conversation. It was no consolation to her that Gerard told her she had made a complete conquest of George. Effie had no thirst for conquest, and she was annoyed instead of being flattered, when her supposed admirer came early next morning to see them off by the train to London, and thus deprived her of her hoped-for tête-à-tête walk with Gerard to the railway station. As the train moved slowly off, leaving the two young men on the platform, all George’s fervent glances were wasted on their object, who kept her eyes fixed on his companion, and could not even spare him one parting look.

CHAPTER VI.

SUCH treats as the visit to Eton were of very rare occurrence in the little family at Prior's Mount. As Harold had said, theirs was usually a very monotonous life. Peaceful, certainly, excepting during one of Jessie's outbreaks, but not free from signs, which to an experienced observer, would have given warning of future storms much more serious than these ebullitions of an undisciplined temper. And these danger-signals were displayed, not by the two in whose characters the most casual acquaintance could detect innumerable failings, but by the two who appeared the most entirely free from any dangerous tendencies. It is a great truth that the many failings of a weak character are much less to be dreaded than the one fault of a strong character. Jessie's selfishness, egotism, and petulance, or Gerard's volatility and self-indulgence, were less likely to lead to serious trouble, than Harold's narrow rigidity, or Effie's pride and self-confidence. One reason for

this was the fact that all the four knew how Jessie and Gerard were prone to fail, whilst not one of them was aware that Harold and Effie had any vulnerable points at all.

Three letters from Effie to her aunts will serve to give an idea of some of these indications which bore a close analogy to a tiny cloud on the horizon, to the ignorant eye a harmless vapour, but to the learned in Nature's secrets, a sure herald of the storm which will shortly obscure the bright summer day.

“Prior's Mount, December 31st.

“DEAREST AUNT,

“A Happy New Year to you, and to aunts Janet and Euphemia. I hope that *my* first happiness to-morrow will be my usual New Year's budget of Gourock gossip: it seems a long time since we have had any tidings of you all. I suppose you will say the same of us, and I know that I deserve any amount of scolding from you, so I will at once disarm your wrath by throwing myself on your mercy. I have some excuse for my neglect in the quantity of work which falls to me at present. Jessie has been a complete invalid for the last three months—never leaving her bed till the middle of the day, and then only to be carried to the sofa. Harold is very anxious about her, but Mr. Rogers assures us that there is no cause for serious uneasiness. She is, I

think, in better spirits than she often is when in good health. Harold, as you may suppose, waits upon her with the most devoted tenderness. The poor dear fellow is very busy, and every moment that he can spare from his wife and his profession is spent on what he calls the 'play-work' of a picture for the Water-colour Exhibition, larger than any he has before undertaken. His evenings are occupied with contributions to various journals, which I write to his dictation, as he finds that much pen-work cramps his hand for his delicate pencil-work.

"Davie is very flourishing, and keeps us all alive with his fun and mischief. I wish you could see him, dear aunt. I am sure it is not the blindness of affection which makes me say that he is a lovely little fellow. We are all proud to walk out with him—his pretty blue eyes, and his golden curls attract so many admirers. He is a dear, good-tempered, happy child, and the only trouble he gives is from his superabundant spirits. Poor little Walter is, at present, very different. He has never been strong—always small, pale, and fretful—and now that he is teething, his irritability is most distressing. The expense of these two young men has so alarmed Harold that we have been trying various schemes for retrenchment, amongst others the substitution of an occasional charwoman for Jane, the nice housemaid who has been with us from the first. Cook and Hannah

undertook to manage the housework between them,—but of course this arrangement has given me much more to do, especially since Jessie has required so much waiting upon. Hannah seems to manage better for her than any one else can, so I take almost the entire charge of the children. Walter is now on my lap—quiet for the first time to-day—and Davie is sitting at my feet, building a tower ‘as high as Ben Lomond,’ about which (*whom* I am always inclined to say of that dear old friend of mine) I have been telling him. You will judge from what I have said that I have not much time for letter-writing. Every spare moment is taken up with needlework, of which Hannah and I have to get through a considerable stock. All this occupation keeps me very well and happy, though I certainly do feel glad when the time comes for creeping into my bed, and feeling Davie’s dear little soft arms round my neck. Baby lies in his crib by my side, for Hannah now sleeps in Harold’s dressing-room, to be ready in case Jessie should need anything in the night. I do hope we shall be able to remain in this house—we are so comfortable here; but it is certainly a very tight fit, and if our family increases, it will soon become impossible to manage. We shall all be sorry to move, however.

“Gerard is coming to live in London. He took a very good degree, and has got his Fellowship. He

has been working 'most steadily for some time, and Harold is very happy about him. He has a capital friend in George Monro, of whom I have often written to you. Gerard is not quite decided about taking Orders, but as he will not be of a suitable age for two years, he intends to have chambers in London, and to see something of life before he binds himself to any vocation. Mr. Monro, who got his Fellowship at the same time as Gerard, is going to remain at Cambridge, and read for a year, and then to travel abroad for some months. Gerard may, perhaps, decide to accompany him. In the meantime it is a great delight to Harold to have his brother so near at hand, and also to Davie, with whom his godfather is an especial favourite.

"Now, I really must leave off—baby is becoming restless, and Davie is making alarming advances to the pen and ink. All send much love. Accept *very* much, dearest aunt,

"From your affectionate Niece,

"EFFIE GARNOCK."

"January 10th.

"MY DEAREST AUNT,

"I have been thinking over your questions ever since I had your letter, and I am sorry to find that I cannot answer them at all satisfactorily. It has worried me once or twice to consider what a

different tone pervades our life at present from that of the happy old life at Pixycombe. Of course much of this change is owing to the loss of that influence which used then to keep us all from getting wrong ; but I do think that our life is, as you say, *too* full of business. The present is quite taken up with little duties and little cares, which will not make way for anything that is *not* present. I know that we might avoid this, and that many people—quite as much occupied as we are—do manage to keep an invisible thread running through their lives, which preserves them from either trifling or grovelling. But this we cannot do—I suppose because we do not set about it in the right way. I often feel with horror that I am gradually losing that hold on higher things which used to seem so firm when papa was here to help us all. Another thing which used to distress me, but to which I am now becoming indifferent, is that none of us attend church regularly, and that we have no family prayers. Jessie is often unwell, and not able either to go out or to be up to breakfast, and then Harold is occupied with her ; and we are not very regular in our hours at any time. You will think that all these are only excuses, and that the honest truth is that we have none of us the will to overcome obstacles. Harold is so good—so high-principled and so kind—that it seems impossible to find any fault in him, but it certainly is the fact that he is

utterly careless about all outward forms of religion. Gerard is very different, but then he has a constant support in his friendship with George Monro; and, besides, Gerard's nature is so affectionate that with him papa's influence is still all-powerful.

"I have written you a long rigmarole, dearest aunt, but your questions seemed to necessitate rigmorish answers, and I cannot help trying to persuade you, as well as myself, that we are not such utter heathens as, in my heart, I feel to be the case.

"I have no time for any gossip, and indeed nothing has occurred since my last letter. Jessie continues much the same. The babies are quite well, and so is Harold.

"Ever your loving Niece,
"EFFIE."

"Gateshill, March 3rd.

"MY DEAR AUNTS,

"You must open your hearts to receive another grand-nephew. A *third* son made his appearance this morning, at five o'clock. A fine brown boy, whom cook declares to be the 'very image of his ma.' I can't say that I see the likeness to anything but a callow bird. Harold professes to be horrified at the rapid increase of his responsibilities, but he is really almost bursting with pride in his three sons. Davie stared intently at the baby for some minutes, and

then said solemnly, 'More budder!' which seemed as if he also thought it more than enough.

"Do not let dear aunt Elizabeth be uneasy about me. I really am not overworked. Walter has been much better lately, and he is such an interesting child that it is a delight to have the charge of him, even when he is fretful. My labours have been much lightened since Gerard has been in London. He undertakes all the writing to dictation, and a good deal of the nursemaid's work—the children are better with him than with any one. He spends every evening here, and many whole days, and he helps us all in turn. He has now got the little boys in the garden. Those hieroglyphics on the other page mean Davie's love to his aunts, whom he would like very much to see.

"Your affectionate Niece,

"E. GARNOCK."

Before Effie had finished her letter, Gerard came in with a child perched on each shoulder.

"Oh, Gerard, take care!" cried Effie in alarm.

"They're all right. Hold on by my whiskers, Davie."

"He would find it difficult," said Effie, laughing.

"I assure you there are as many as three hairs," rejoined Gerard, solemnly.

"Give Walter to me," pleaded Effie.

"Indeed I shall not. Walter is very well where he is; and you are to rest, small woman."

"I have had my rest, and now it is your turn. How hot you look, Gerard."

"I should think so. This young rascal has been tearing out my hair by handfuls, and that villain Davie has been drumming on my chest with his heels."

"Do let me have them now."

"What I thinks I says: what I says I means: and what I means I does. What I thinks is that you look pale and fagged: what I says is that you are to go and lie down: and what I does is to dismount my young tyrants, and to show them the most delightful game on the floor that it is possible to imagine. Come, Effie," he continued, when he and the children were stretched on the carpet, "you go and lie down for at least two hours—even a ministering angel can't do without natural rest, and you will be anything but angelic by to-morrow if you keep slaving on in this way."

"Indeed I would rather not lie down, Gerard. I could not sleep."

"Why should you not sleep?"

"Me tell untle Day," lisped Davie.

"Tell, then, Davie," said Gerard.

"Auntie tant seep cos me be naughty boy."

"Why 'me be naughty boy?' asked Gerard.

"If auntie seep," persisted Davie.

"But why should you be a naughty boy if auntie sleeps?"

"Course me be naughty boy if auntie seep."

"Are you always naughty when auntie is asleep?"

"Allus naughty," rejoined Davie, complacently.

Gerard and Effie laughed. "Davie is like a certain uncle of his," said Effie, "who is always threatening to be naughty. I don't think you are so bad as you used to be, Gerard; you are not now always asserting that you must inevitably go wrong."

"The change is due to you, then," said Gerard, hurriedly. He went on, bending his head over Walter, so that Effie could not see his face: "When one sees a small sprite going on day after day, and week after week, doing everything for everybody, and never thinking anything of it—slaving like a nigger, and yet always keeping a white face—always clean and always cheerful—one can't have this always before one's eyes and not become better and stronger in right-doing." He suddenly raised his head, and looked straight at Effie: "If I could make sure of having such a ministering angel always about me I should have no more doubts of myself."

There was an earnestness in his tone very unusual in Gerard, and a look in his eyes which Effie had never seen there before. Her heart beat rapidly, sending the blood so violently to her face that she

was immensely relieved when Davie seized the poker, and made such alarming demonstrations towards the fire that she was forced to interfere. It was not calculated to calm her agitation that during her little struggle with her nephew she felt that Gerard was still regarding her with that strange look. When, however, peace was restored, and, in accordance with the terms of the treaty, Effie began to draw Davie a "booful budder," Gerard was quite himself again.

"Oh, by-the-by, Effie," he said, "I have had such a shock this morning. Look here!" He threw her a smart white envelope, with silver edges, containing two cards, also edged with silver, and tied together with a silver true-love-knot, on which was engraved "Captain Hector Beamish," and "Mrs. Hector Beamish." There was a third card, a plain one, bearing the name of "Lilian Home."

"Poor fellow!" cried Effie.

"You unfeeling girl!" said Gerard, "you seem more amused than sympathetic."

"I don't think there is any demand on my sympathy at present. Now if the lady's name were——" Effie hesitated.

"What?" asked Gerard, breathlessly.

"Clara Monro," replied Effie, with some timidity.

"You are wrong," said Gerard, in a strange, embarrassed manner. "There is a name," he continued

vehemently, "which it would make me awfully savage to see coupled with any other man's, but it is not 'Clara Monro.'"

Effie dared not ask "Whose then?" so she occupied herself with Davie, and said nothing.

"See here, Effie," whispered Gerard, after a short pause, "this poor little fellow has fallen asleep." Walter lay in his arms, sleeping peacefully.

"You must be tired of holding him, Gerard. Lay him on the sofa; I will make it comfortable for him."

"Well, I ought to be going. I am engaged to dine out. But I want to speak to Harold. I wonder whether——Talk of the——etc."

"And he is sure to appear," pursued Harold, entering the room. "What were you saying of me? Nothing bad, I hope."

"Effie, you must take him," said Gerard, in difficulties with the child; "I can't lay him down comfortably."

Effie took the little boy from his uncle's arms, and laid him on the sofa. Harold sat down, with Davie on his knee.

"I wanted to speak to you, Harold," began Gerard, nervously. "I must be going directly, but I have something to say first."

"Say on," returned Harold, contentedly beginning to take Davie to Banbury Cross.

“I have nearly paid off all my College debts, and my Fellowship, with my own fifty pounds, is quite enough for me—so, please, I won’t take the eighty pounds from you any longer.”

“The eighty pounds from me !”

“Yes. I know you said I was not to thank you, or to say anything about it ; but now that I have determined to give it up, it can’t signify,—and we all here know about it, except Davie.”

“But I don’t know what you mean by *eighty* pounds. I would much rather you should continue to take the *fifty* I have allowed you, for the present, at any rate ; but it has never been more than fifty.”

“Why, Hay, what a rich man you must be, to give away thirty pounds a year, and never miss it ! I have had eighty, instead of fifty, for three years now. I never spoke about it before, because I had a message from you that you did not wish to be thanked.”

“*I* never sent you any such message—and *I* never gave you more than fifty pounds.”

“Effie ! Bear witness. Did he not ? His threefold paternity has affected his memory !”

Poor Effie ! She had stood trembling in a corner—turning from pale to red, and from red to pale from the moment when she saw what turn the conversation was taking. She now came forward, look-

ing like a culprit. Both Harold and Gerard were wonder-struck at her agitation.

“No, Gerard, he did not. I told a lie. I had no need for fifty pounds a year—and I knew how papa would have liked me to spend it.—I beg your pardon, Gerard—I——” She broke down completely, and fled from the room.

“Harold ! She *is* an angel !” cried Gerard, greatly moved.

“She is a good little girl,” said Harold, quietly.

“Poor dear little thing ! And I used to bully her for being so shabby ! Harold, what shall I do ? How can I ever repay her ?”

“Do you think she wishes to be repaid ?” asked Harold.

“No—but—I say, I must be off !—I suppose Effie won’t come back. Give my love to Jessie.” As he spoke, Gerard caught up a piece of paper, and wrote on it :—

“DEAREST LITTLE WOMAN,

Don’t be shy of me—I won’t say a word more about it. But I never shall forget who it was that, when she had only a very little loaf herself, gave me more than half of it. What a selfish brute you must have thought me all the time !

“Yours,

“G. A. Y.”

Gerard folded this up, and, giving it to Harold, said, "That is for Effie. Good-bye, little man. I say, Davie, don't be a naughty boy when auntie is asleep; be a very good boy, and then poor auntie will be able to rest when she is tired—so tired! Really, Harold, you must look after Effie: she will slave herself to death, if you don't take care. It's not fair that she should have so much to do. Good-bye, old fellow. I hope the baby will turn out a first-rater. I shall come early to-morrow, to make sure that Effie is not put upon. Now, remember Davie, be very good to your aunt."

CHAPTER VII.

“LET me see if you’ll do, Effie. Turn about ! Yes, all right—very simple and nice. And here is a finish for you.”

“Oh, Harold, how kind ! What beautiful flowers ! You extravagant fellow ! But, nevertheless, thank you very much.”

“You must not thank *me*, nor scold me either. Gerard brought them this afternoon. A bouquet for you, and another for Jessie—rather a scrubby one for his sister-in-law, I must say. I suppose he expended all his forces on those beautiful camelias. Yes, put one in your hair, it wants some ornament.”

“Gerard here this afternoon ! At what time ?”

“When you were out with the children. He was very hot and breathless, but he would not stay a minute. He gave me most particular injunctions about keeping his precious flowers fresh, and only giving them to you when you were dressed.”

The Monros had taken a house in London for the

season, and to-night George's twenty-first birthday was to be celebrated by a dance, to which the Yonges and Effie were invited.

"Will Jessie be long?" asked Harold, after a pause, during which Effie had been gloating over her flowers.

"I don't know. Hannah is acting as her maid; she would not have me."

"And who acted as *your* maid?"

"Davie," answered Effie, laughing. "He was so excited that he could not go to sleep; indeed, I had hard work to get him to bed at all; and I was so afraid he would wake Walter."

"What would Hannah do if Baby should wake?"

"Oh, Baby is quite safe; he never wakes when he ought to sleep. He is like Davie was."

"You can't say the same of Davie now, it seems. I wish Jessie would come; the fly has been waiting nearly half an hour."

In spite of Jessie's unpunctuality, the music had not begun when they reached the Monros' house in Portman Square. Unobservant as Harold usually was, he could not but be struck by the admiring glances which were directed to his wife, as she entered the drawing-rooms, leaning on his arm. George Monro immediately hastened towards them.

"Mrs. Yonge, let me find you a seat. How kind of you to come, Yonge. That faithless Gerard has

not made his appearance yet, though he promised to support me through all my responsibilities. Miss Garnock, the dancing is just going to begin—will you take me for your partner?”

In spite of Effie's ignorance of such matters, she was conscious that it must be an unjustifiable breach of etiquette for the hero of the evening to open the ball with one so insignificant as herself. But George Monro had no notion of consulting “Mrs. Grundy” as to what he should or should not do.

“I am so glad you are all here to-night,” George said, as soon as they had taken their places at the top of the long quadrille. “How lovely your sister is looking! What a proud man Yonge must be!” In the next pause of the dance he said, “Was it not good of my father and mother to resolve to spend this spring in town? They are both so wedded to a country life. But Clara ought to see some society beyond that of our village.”

When the figure allowed of his returning to Effie's side, George continued — “What particularly pleases me in this arrangement is that I hope it may give Clara an opportunity of seeing a great deal of you. I do so wish that she may have you for a friend, Miss Garnock!”

“I am sure I should be very glad,” answered Effie.

“Clara is the best girl possible,” George went on. “If she has a fault, it is that of being *too* amiable.”

“And therefore you wish that she may see a great deal of me,” remarked Effie, maliciously. “Gerard must have been betraying home secrets!”

“Whatever Gerard has told me has done you the highest honour,” protested George. “What I mean is that Clara wants strength of character, and it is therefore most essential that her friends should be well chosen.”

“Miss Monro looks in better health than she did when we met at Eton; I have not seen her since, you know.”

“That is nearly two years ago! It was on the 25th of July; two years all but two months. How well I remember that day!”

“So do I. It was quite a day to be remembered with us—we have so few holidays.”

Effie found it rather hard work to keep up this conversation with George. Her attention would wander to the door, and every movement in the group collected there caused a corresponding agitation under her white dress. Clara was just opposite, at the other end of the long room, and Effie thought that *she* also appeared peculiarly interested in the group at the entrance. Presently Clara started and coloured. Effie followed the direction of her eyes, and saw Gerard, towering above all the other heads, and coming forward with his usual bright, eager look. As he passed behind Clara, she put out her hand.

He stopped for a minute, but Clara was evidently not his object : he was looking beyond her. Soon he had made his way to the top of the room, and Effie caught his eye. She nodded and smiled. He returned the greeting, but very gravely. Effie looked up at George, to see if he noticed Gerard's strange manner, and she was struck with the wonderful animation of her partner's countenance, and the fervid glow in his handsome eyes. She was relieved when the dance was over, and wished George would take her back to her seat, but he kept walking about the room, talking earnestly.

“ You must promise to dance with me very frequently to-night, Miss Garnock,” he said, suddenly breaking off in the midst of a glowing account of the good deeds of a zealous clergyman in one of the mining districts. “ I am to have everything my own way to-night, and am to be allowed to enjoy myself thoroughly. You know the popular belief, that a criminal on the eve of his execution is given whatever dainty he may desire. It is the same case with me. I look upon this as my last meal in Vanity Fair, and therefore I am not to be stinted in any delicacy.”

“ Do you intend to forswear the world, then ? I did not know you disapproved of dancing.”

“ Nor do I. I think dancing a particularly wholesome exercise ; and, for my own part, I am passion-

ately fond of it. But in my judgment—many better men think otherwise, and I will not presume to say they are wrong—but my feeling is that there should be some line of separation between the clergy and the laity, and I think that this matter of dancing, play-going, hunting, &c., is as good a line as any other. You see, a clergyman can never lay aside his office—he cannot put it in a bag with his surplice—and it seems to me that where his surplice would be out of place, he and his office have no right to be.

“Then would you give up all parties?”

“By no means. If I chose to come in my surplice, and sit on one of those benches, no one would object, and it would not appear any very out-of-the-way proceeding. But should I, in that garb, whirl round in a waltz, with my white tails flying out behind me, and my hood acting as a lasso to catch my partner, I imagine that even the least scrupulous would cry shame upon me.”

“I never thought of the matter in that light,” said Effie, meditatively. “My father, who was a clergyman, never mixed in any frivolities himself. But he used to say that he was prejudiced from having been brought up as a Presbyterian, and that his rule would not apply to others in his position.”

“I have seen your father, Miss Garnock,” said George, in a low voice.

“You, Mr. Monro!”

“Yes. At Eton Gerard used often to talk to me of his home, and he inspired me with a great reverence for his adopted father. Just after the Easter holidays, four years ago, I had the measles very severely, and I was sent to Devonshire to recruit. Finding myself within about twenty miles of Pixycombe, I rode over there one Saturday, and was present at both the services the next day, but I had not courage to introduce myself at the Vicarage. Do you know, Miss Garnock, that Sunday has coloured my whole life. I had previously no thought of taking Orders. I was to follow in my father’s steps as a country squire. My career seemed chalked out for me; but your father said words that day,—I remember both his sermons as if I had heard them only yesterday,—so simple, and yet so elevated, full of that true, dignified simplicity which proceeds from wealth of ideas, not from the poverty which we so often meet with in sermons. But what was I saying?”

“That papa’s words——”

“Oh, yes. What I heard that day, and still more what I saw,—the reverend, grey-haired priest, and his devoted people,—so impressed me, that from that moment my highest ambition was to take upon me an office which, when so discharged, could confer such an almost unearthly dignity.”

Effie felt greatly moved. “Have you ever told Gerard this?” she asked.

“No. There are some things of which one cannot speak, even to one’s dearest friend. But how the same feeling influences Gerard! You see, he cannot resolve to take Orders, because your father’s example has given him such a reverence for the holy office that, in his exaggerated self-depreciation, he thinks himself unworthy of it. Were he to become a clergyman, you would see, Miss Garnock, that it would be impossible for him to dance, or hunt, or attend races and theatres.”

“But you are not going to take Orders at once, Mr. Monro?”

“No; but I shall return to Cambridge next week, and remain there, reading hard, till I go abroad in November. Directly I come back to England I shall be ordained: so this will be my last party as a layman, and, thanks to you, my best.”

“George, you must do some introducing,” said Clara, coming up hastily to her brother; “the gentlemen are all in knots, and there is a most formidable array of ladies all round the room.”

“Shall I take you to your sister, Miss Garnock?”

“Oh, no, thank you; any seat will do.” She was not sure that her sister’s neighbourhood would be very peaceful, considering that Jessie had not been dancing.

As soon as George had left her, Effie saw that Gerard was approaching, but shyly, in crab-fashion.

She watched him in the greatest terror, lest she should be carried off to dance before he could reach her. When he had got almost within speaking distance, his course was arrested by a friend, and, at the same moment, George Monro came up to Effie.

“Miss Garnock, let me introduce Mr. Flamstead.”

“May I have the pleasure—this dance—” muttered Mr. Flamstead, and Effie, honest and unsophisticated, could not say that she did not intend to dance this time, when she *had* intended to dance with Gerard. In desperation, however, when her partner-elect put out his arm to lead her to the set, she said, “The music has not begun, we need not take our places just yet.”

Mr. Flamstead politely assented, and then set flowing a quiet little rill of common-places, which made very little demand on his companion’s attention. Effie was just beginning to entertain the most uncharitable sentiments towards the harmless little man, when Gerard again moved on. She half started forward, and said, “Gerard. I *must* thank you,” holding out her flowers.

“They ought to have secured me a dance,” said Gerard, reproachfully.

“*I* could not ask *you*,” returned Effie, as she walked away with Mr. Flamstead.

Gerard followed them: “Will you be my vis-à-vis?—I will get a partner—” and he disappeared.

“I am engaged to a vis-à-vis,” remarked Mr. Flamstead, leading Effie to the top of the room, opposite to where George Monro was standing with a tall, fair girl.

Gerard soon came up with Clara: “Where shall we stand?” he asked Effie.

“I—I am afraid we are engaged to stand here—Mr. Monro had arranged——”

“Oh, I see,” said Gerard, and he turned abruptly away, and went with his partner to the further end of the room.

Effie had now no attention left for Mr. Flamstead’s small talk, and very little for the few earnest sentences which George managed to speak to her whenever they met in the dance; and yet she could not but acknowledge the rare perfection of George’s voice and manner, even when saying such unwelcome words as, “Are you free for the next dance, Miss Garnock?—a waltz—will you consider yourself bound to me, then?”

Effie was forced to consent, and she was soon whirling round with George, without having exchanged a word or a look with Gerard. She began to think a great party was no such pleasant experience after all.

“How well you two waltz together,” remarked Harold, as George and Effie rested for a moment near him. “You are the admiration of the whole room.”

Effie presently saw that they were almost the only dancers, and she begged her partner to stop.

“Gerard, do go on,” cried George; “we are having such a splendid waltz, and Miss Garnock wishes to give up because there are no other dancers. Keep us in countenance, there’s a good fellow!”

“I have no partner,” replied Gerard, coldly.

“Get one. There is Clara sitting down.”

“I do not care for waltzing,” Gerard said, in the same tone as before. “You two appear to enjoy it immensely,” he added savagely, and then walked away.

Effie sat down during the next dance, but Gerard did not come near her, although she could see him all the time talking very gravely to Mr. Monro. The next quadrille she stood up with Harold, who remarked on Gerard’s evident depression, and said that Jessie did not appear to enjoy herself as much as he had hoped she would. Effie could have added that *she* did not enjoy herself so much as she had hoped she should. As they walked about after the dance, Harold went up to his brother.

“There is something wrong with you, Gay. What is it?”

“Nothing. But it is not possible that all should find equal enjoyment in an affair of this sort.”

“Are you not going to dance with me at all, Gerard?” asked Effie, timidly.

"I am afraid of boring you," said Gerard, looking away from her whilst he spoke. "It would be dull work for you to dance with me."

"Have you made a vow to be dull to-night, then?"

"I intended to be anything but dull—I meant to have an evening of the most perfect enjoyment."

"And what has happened? Are your boots tight?"

"I should think *you* need not ask what has happened, Effie," replied Gerard, tragically.

"I want to take Jessie to have an ice, Effie," said Harold. "Will you go with me, or stay with Gerard?"

"I will stay with Gerard," answered Effie, boldly. Gerard brightened, and stretched out his arm.

"Do you say so out of charity?" he inquired.

"Charity to myself?" asked Effie.

"No; you have a fancy for victimizing yourself, and so you choose to stay with me. Is not that it?" He looked at her with one of his own sweet smiles for the first time that evening. Before Effie could answer, George Monro came to her side.

"Miss Garnock, we are all ready for the 'Lancers,'" he said; "you know you promised to steer me through their intricacies."

"There, go and steer him through all the intricacies of life," said Gerard, dropping her arm, and

walking off. Effie had not another word from him that evening. She caught sight of him once or twice, glowering at her from a distance, but he never came near enough for her to attempt making her peace.

At the supper she and George were placed exactly opposite to Gerard and Clara. The buzz of various sounds prevented any words spoken in an ordinary tone from reaching the other side of the table ; but Gerard, in answer to some observation of his companion, suddenly raised his voice, and said, "Friendship: that is all a delusion! A mere dream of fools and poets! Woman's friendship, too! Why, the first trifler who whispers soft nothings in her ear can make her false to a life-long friendship!" With these words, he sent such a savage glance across the table that Effie, catching his eye, positively quailed under it.

"What is the matter with Gerard?" asked George. "What is he haranguing about? Poor Clara looks like a little girl being scolded for not knowing her lesson properly. What makes you so fierce, Gerard?" he inquired in a louder voice.

"The hollowness and hypocrisy of the world," replied Gerard, looking half ashamed of his own vehemence.

"What has put you in this moralizing strain?" asked George again.

"Life is not quite such a smooth course to me as

it is to you," replied Gerard, bitterly. "It falls to one man's lot to dig and hoe, and to another's to gather the ripe fruit. Shall we go upstairs, Clara?" And he marched off, rather like a stage noble proceeding to his execution.

George laughed: "What *can* be the matter with Gerard?" he said. "He is so unusually solemn. I must try and find out what is wrong. His crust is sure to melt in five minutes. He is the best-tempered fellow in the world, usually, as I have no doubt you are aware, Miss Garnock, without my telling you."

As George was taking Effie to the carriage, about an hour later, Gerard was looking for his hat in the hall.

"Are you going so soon, Gerard?" asked George.

"Yes, I am going," replied Gerard, roughly.

"Is anything the matter?" inquired George.

"No. Good-night."

But he was not to escape so easily. Harold, who was already in the Gateshill fly, called out, "Gerard, is that you? Shall we see you to-morrow?"

"I think not," replied Gerard, doubtfully. "No, certainly not," he added, as George and Effie slowly descended the steps. "Good-night, Jessie."

"Good-night, Gerard," cried Effie, faintly.

"Good-night," he replied, without looking back.

"What *has* put Gerard out?" asked Harold.

"Your sister and I have just been speculating what it can be," replied George. "*I* never saw him cross before."

"Nor I," said Harold, "nor any of us, I believe."

"Thank you all very much for coming to-night," said George, looking in at the carriage window, when they were all seated. "And now I have another favour to ask. Clara and I are going to the Chiswick flower-show on Saturday. We have some tickets to spare: will you accept of them, and come with us?"

"I should like it extremely," said Jessie.

Effie said nothing. She did not know whether she dared like it.

"Can you do without me?" asked Harold. "I have an engagement on Saturday."

"Yes, if you will let us have your ladies—though, of course, we would rather you should come also."

"Of course you must say so. Well, I will send you my womankind."

"Thank you. Then you and Miss Garnock will come and take luncheon with us, Mrs. Yonge, and we will all go together. The carriage shall fetch you at twelve. Will that do?"

"You can send the children to Mrs. Samuel Butterfield's," suggested Harold.

"Yes, that will do perfectly," said Jessie.

"Perhaps I had better stay with the children," put in Effie, timidly.

"That you shall not !" cried Harold.

"It would be a great—a very great disappointment to me if you were to do so," said George, leaning forward, and speaking low.

"A very pleasant party," observed Jessie, as they drove off. Sufficient attention had been paid her during the latter part of the evening to make amends for any lack of partners at the beginning of the dancing.

"Very pleasant," replied Harold, yawning. He had been satisfied with everything, as usual; but he was still better satisfied to be going home.

"Very pleasant," echoed Effie; but she thought how much pleasanter most evenings were.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Effie reached her own little room, and had time to think over the events of the evening, she found that, although she had been disappointed in her actual enjoyment of the Monros' party, there was a strange, and almost overpowering delight in recalling some incidents which at the time had pained her. Gerard's unaccountable conduct could, on reflection, be interpreted but in one way. He had been always kind, brotherly, and affectionate towards her; for some months—more especially since the discovery about the thirty pounds—his manner had been even tender; but never till this evening had she realized the fact that he regarded her with at all that kind of exclusive affection which she had so long lavished upon him. She now hardly dared to admit the idea, but as she sat at her window in the early dawn, with *his* flowers in a glass by her side, the idea *would* creep in with the sweet morning air, and there was music in her heart which made her

deaf to the joyous notes of the birds in the garden. Not deaf to one little voice, however.

“Auntie, me want to det up.”

“No, Davie, go to sleep again. It is not time to get up yet.”

“Auntie up.”

“Auntie is just coming to bed. Be quiet now, or you’ll wake Walter.”

“Me want Walter to wake. Me want to det up.”

“Poor Auntie is so sleepy, Davie. Auntie has not been to bed all night.”

“Poor Auntie! Auntie tome to bed. Davie put Auntie by-by.”

But before the charitable design could be accomplished, Davie had put himself to “by-by,” and was again sleeping peacefully. So Effie was able to remain some time longer at the window, dreaming, though not sleeping. When at last she crept into bed, it was to fall into a disturbed slumber, haunted by visions of George, Gerard, and herself continually whirling about in a wild dance, in which George was always coming between her and Gerard. It was a great relief when Walter’s little feeble voice dispelled these nightmare shapes, and the dreams of the night were lost in the business of the day.

It was a trying day. The little household, in their quiet life, had seldom experienced the lassitude of reaction after strong excitement, and now it was all

the more painful that they hardly understood their own feelings. Jessie was feverish and irritable—angry with Effie about George Monro's devotion, and vexed with Harold for not being able to satisfy her curiosity as to what ailed Gerard. Effie soon lost her happy feelings. The flowers were there certainly, but there was nothing else to give any probability to such very extravagant hopes: it was evident that Harold and Jessie had not seen Gerard's behaviour in the light which her vanity had thrown over it. And what was there in a gift of flowers? Harold might as well have been the donor—indeed she had, at first, attributed them to his generosity. So, as the weary day dragged on, her happy morning thoughts died out one by one, till when she went to bed that night, she looked spitefully at her own brown face in the glass, and hissed out, "You ugly little self-deceiving fool!"

"Harold, do you think it will rain?" asked Jessie, for the third time, on the morning of the Chiswick fête, as she appeared in a pretty light dress and scarf, and a bonnet new for the occasion.

"It looks threateningly," answered Harold, also for the third time. "You had better take umbrellas, and put on thick boots. Would it not be prudent to wear a more substantial cloak, Jessie?"

"Impossible," said Jessie, hastily. "Effie! you are not going that figure! It is not treating the

Monros with proper respect to wear your every-day dress."

"My every-day dress!" replied Effie, gaily. "You are not treating my *Sunday-best* with proper respect, Jessie."

"But a black scarf—she ought not to wear a black scarf on such an occasion, ought she, Harold?"

"I really cannot decide that question," answered Harold; "I think Effie looks very nice."

"It seems so likely to rain," said Effie, "and I hate to have a fuss about getting wet. Now no amount of wetting will hurt me; and my boots would do to walk through a pond."

"I hope you have stout boots, Jessie," said Harold, anxiously.

"I am not going to make such a sight of myself as to be a disgrace to the whole party," replied Jessie. "I suppose we had better start now. Where are we to take you, Harold?"

"I will go with you as far as Portman Square," replied Harold, "and then I shall go on to Holborn and see after Gerard, before I go to Makiss's. I don't like the boy not having made his appearance for these three days, particularly after his strange manner on Tuesday night."

The Monros also appeared uneasy about Gerard's "strange manner on Tuesday night."

"Have you seen your brother since Tuesday?"

asked Mrs. Monro of Jessie. "The children tell me he did not seem well then. Young men living alone never manage themselves properly. I dare say his stomach was out of order—and the messes that were on our table that night would not make matters better. Is it not strange, Mrs. Yonge?—They tell me the duties of hospitality demand that one should poison one's friends with all kinds of trash, and urge them to eat and drink more than they can possibly digest. And the wine!—What a mixture! Mr. Monro was cajoled by a wine-merchant into taking some wine—'suitable for a supper-party,' they called it—and such a nauseous dose you never tasted. I dare say it was made up of chemist's messes and water. I will never again have a drop of cheap wine in my house, or a dish made out of my own kitchen. I felt quite hot to think I should be to blame for people destroying their digestions as they did that night. Here is Clara has been looking quite unwholesome ever since—pale and puffy, with red eyes—and George has been feverish and excited, very unlike himself. I am only glad the boys were out of the way; and little Charlie—I would not have him in London for a great deal: I should never feel sure he was not in a pastrycook's. His father is charge enough! I shall be glad when we are all safe in Suffolk once more. Now come to luncheon, Mrs. Yonge. We have only a joint, and a rice-pudding,

you see. We are obliged to be so careful of Edward's digestion, and he never can resist whatever he sees. George, call your father, please."

An hour later, Mrs. Monro would have thought the rice-pudding was disagreeing with her son's digestion if she had seen George's flushed face and eager eyes as he walked his horse by Effie's side. A Captain Perry had joined the party at luncheon, and he and George rode to Chiswick, whilst the ladies occupied an open carriage. Neither Jessie nor Effie had ever witnessed such a gay scene as the line of smart heads slowly moving towards the gardens. Jessie was enchanted, and was very lively and agreeable. This was a great relief to the girls. Clara was pale and silent, in spite of Captain Perry's eager efforts to rouse her; and Effie felt very little disposed to talk. Directly they were in the gardens, Captain Perry offered his arm to Clara, and George, with no French fear of ridicule, took the other two ladies. They had only walked a few paces when Gerard overtook them. He looked pale and grave.

"Harold sent me here," he said: "I did not intend coming, though I got your note, George,—thank you for it, and for the ticket."

"Why did you not intend coming?" asked George.

"I did not think it would be any pleasure to me," replied Gerard; "but Harold was so fidgetty about the weather, when he remembered that Jessie had

taken no umbrella, that he made me come with one—which behold! And now, of course, it won't rain."

"Well, the threatening clouds have, at any rate, had the good effect of sending you here," said Effie, making a desperate effort.

Gerard looked pleased: "Monro, you must give me up one of your ladies. Which is it to be?"

Poor George looked very nervous, and did not answer. Effie could not, and only began to tremble. Jessie cried out gaily, "Oh, it must be Effie—I cannot be condemned for a whole afternoon to the society of my brother-in-law." She little knew what delight this careless speech of hers gave to two of her hearers, or the severe disappointment it caused the third. Nobody, however, opposed her decision. Gerard instantly offered his arm to Effie, and they were soon separated from the other couples.

"Are you very savage with me, Effie?" Gerard asked, shyly, when they had walked a short distance in silence.

Effie knew by his glance that he meant, was she savage with him for separating her from George, but she would not appear to understand him.

"Savage? No. What for?" she asked. "Oh yes," she added, hastily; "we are all very angry with you for not having come near us for so many days."

"I did not think any one would care whether I came or not," said Gerard, gloomily.

Effie looked into his face, and laughed. All her doubts seemed to have vanished now, and she felt happy and fearless.

“Did you wish to see me, really, Effie?”

“Of course I did. I wanted to talk over the party.”

“The party was no fun to me,” muttered Gerard.

“Was it not? *I* thought it very pleasant,” said Effie, rather maliciously.

“I have no doubt you did. Do you know the fable of the boys and the frogs?”

“I forget. What is it about? I never remember fables.”

“Shall I tell it you, Effie?”

“Yes, please. Improve my mind in any way you can.”

“Listen then : There were once upon a time some boys playing beside a pond. On the banks of the pond there were some frogs. The boys, in wanton mischief, began throwing stones at the frogs, for the fun of seeing the poor creatures hop about in fear and agony. At last one frog raised his head, and cried, ‘How can you be so cruel? Do you not know that what is sport to you is death to us?’”

“Well?” asked Effie, as Gerard paused.

“Can you not apply the moral of my fable?”

“No. I am quite in the dark.”

“Must I do it for you?”

“Yes—if you want it done.”

“There was once upon a time a little girl. She was not a bad little girl at heart, but she was proud and careless. There was a boy, who had been her friend as long as they could both remember anything. She was always kind to him—*too* kind, sometimes——” Gerard’s voice faltered, and he paused. Effie felt an unpleasant tightening in her throat.

Gerard continued, standing still, and tracing diagrams on the ground with his umbrella: “Because the little girl had always been so good to him, the boy got to fancy that he was to have everything his own way, and that nothing could ever come between them. There came an occasion—an occasion to which the boy, or the *man*, I should say, had been looking forward with delight for weeks, because he hoped that in a crowd of strangers to them both she and he would be all in all to one another. When the time came he was grievously disappointed. The little girl looked very nice indeed—in her simple white frock, and just a white flower in her smooth brown hair,—and others besides himself thought her worth all the fine beauties there, and so, instead of having her all to himself, there she was talking, and laughing, and *flirting*”—this objectional word was hissed out fiercely—“with all sorts of strange men, and hardly deigning to give him one look. Do you not think he must have suffered bitter pain and grief? And,

when he saw her enjoying herself without a thought of him, and seeming almost to mock at his misery, might he not say with the poor frog, ‘What is sport to you is death to me?’ ”

“Are you talking of me the other night at the Monros, Gerard?” asked Effie simply.

“Have I not drawn a true likeness of you, Effie?”

“No!” cried Effie, “quite false! I was *not* enjoying myself. I was very much disappointed that you would not dance with me.”

“On your honour, Effie?”

“Of course. You were the only person there whom I cared to dance with.”

“Effie! on your honour? Are you thinking what you say?”

Effie’s answer was lost in a sudden down-pour of the long-threatened shower. A few big drops had fallen, unnoticed by them both, but it was no longer possible to be unconscious of the complete sheet of rain which was descending.

“Oh, poor Jessie!” cried Effie. “They have no umbrella, and she will be wet through! We *must* find them.”

“But you want an umbrella as much as Jessie does.”

“No, I don’t. I dressed on purpose for the rain, and Jessie has such light things on. Do come to them, Gerard!” She almost dragged him from the

retired path into which they had wandered, out on to the open space, towards one of the bands, where several groups were assembled.

“There they are!” cried Effie, presently; “I am sure that is Mr. Monro’s head!”

Gerard did not resist any longer, and they soon reached the miserable-looking couple, who were standing in a shower-bath on the musicians’ deserted platform, Jessie being afraid to cross the already soaked grass in her thin shoes. Directly Gerard and Effie appeared, George cried out, “Gerard! Bring your umbrella to Mrs. Yonge, she cannot leave these boards. Miss Garnock, I know your boots are thick—come with me to that seat—Clara and Captain Perry have taken refuge there.”

Almost before Effie knew what she was about, she was running with George across the grass, leaving Gerard holding his umbrella over Jessie, and looking blacker than the lowering clouds. The tent was too crowded for any one to attempt seeing the flowers, and the atmosphere was stifling. George and Effie stood in the entrance—he trying to make up for the time lost since their arrival in the gardens, and she thinking over every word and look of Gerard’s during the last half-hour. This occupation was so pleasant that Effie hardly wished for the rain to cease—feeling almost that she had had enough happiness for one day.

The rain did not cease, and the appearance of the

clouds was so very unpromising, that Clara proposed they should get away as soon as possible. Captain Perry seconded this prudent motion, and George at last started forth to tell Jessie and Gerard of their determination. He returned in a few minutes to say that the others entirely approved, and soon Gerard was seen carrying Jessie across the grass in his strong arms.

“Bravo!” cried George. “Most men would have shrunk from such a thing as that before this mob of fashionables.”

“I know one other man that would not,” remarked Clara.

“Oh,” replied George, “*I* am a humdrum old parson-elect. It is a much more meritorious thing in a dashing young fellow like Gerard.”

All this passed as they were making their way to the gate. Here they found Jessie comfortably established in a dry corner under the awning, whilst Gerard had gone to get the carriage up. Jessie's clothes were hardly damp, but when Gerard came back he was dripping with wet.

“Your umbrella was not much use to yourself, Gerard!” cried George.

“My being drenched was of no consequence,” said Gerard.

“Will it be of no consequence if you get rheumatic fever?” asked Clara.

"Not of the slightest," replied Gerard, in the tone which Effie had heard for the first time on Tuesday evening. "No one will care," he added, bitterly.

"Is there any chance of the carriage, Mr. Yonge?" asked Captain Perry.

"It will be up in about a quarter of an hour," replied Gerard.

"You must all three pack yourselves under the seats, I think," said George, laughing.

"Oh, yes," cried Effie. "We shall be able to manage that famously. But what will you poor creatures do on horseback?"

"Oh, we shall do very well," answered George. "At any rate, we shall not be so wet as poor Gerard. How shall you get home, Gerard?"

"Come with us, Mr. Yonge," said Clara. "There is room for another in the carriage."

"No, thank you — I think I will go straight home."

"Had we not better move nearer the entrance?" suggested Captain Perry.

In the general move, Gerard and Effie got slightly separated from the others, in the crowd. Gerard did not offer his arm, but in a sudden crush Effie caught hold of his coat-sleeve to steady herself.

"I beg your pardon," Gerard said, coldly, and immediately forced a clear space for her. Another pressure from behind took them both to an opening,

where they could stand with their backs to the crowd. Gerard placed his hands upon the framework of the awning over Effie's head, and so saved her from being pushed into the open air. They stood thus for some minutes without speaking. Being placed in front of Gerard, Effie could not see his face. At last he said, in a hoarse, trembling voice, "You had better marry that man, and have done with it, Effie. I can bear this no longer."

"He has not asked me to marry him," said Effie, too honest to pretend she did not know what man he meant.

"If that is the only obstacle, I shall soon have to congratulate you. *Is that the only obstacle, Effie?*" There was an accent of pain in his voice, which touched Effie deeply; but she was angry at his quick relapse into jealousy, and could not resist teasing him a little.

"I don't see by what right you ask that, Gerard."

"I beg your pardon. You have spoilt me. There used never to be any question of *right* between us. But of course all that must be different now."

Effie was fairly melted. "It must not be different now," she cried. "I think it would break my heart if there were any change between us, Gerard!"

"There must be a change, Effie. Platonic affection is all very well for poets—but show me the husband that will stand it."

"But I am not going to have a husband."

"Effie, you are cruel! First you say one thing, and then another; and you won't let me ask you a simple question."

"If *I* am cruel, Gerard, *you* are unfair! What do you want me to say?"

"I want you to say you won't marry George Monro."

"I won't marry George Monro. Will that do?"

"Not quite—now I want you to say that you will marry me."

Effie was seized with a sudden doubt, "Gerard, if you are joking it is very wicked!" she said.

"Joking! I don't feel like joking, Effie! For the last four days I have been in torment. Will you not see—will you not know that I love you? Effie! I love you—I love you—and if you won't love me, I'll——" he suddenly dropped his outstretched hands upon her two shoulders, and looked round into her face: "Effie! For pity's sake say you love me—or, if you can't now, that you will some day. Remember who told you to take care of me; and how can you take care of me better than by marrying me?"

Effie looked full into his brimming eyes. Her heart seemed as if it must burst with overpowering emotion; but she only said, quietly and cheerfully, "I will take care of you, Gerard."

"Will you marry me?"

"If you like."

"Do *you* like?"

"Yes."

"Miss Garnock, the carriage has come up. I have been looking for you everywhere," said Captain Perry, making his way through the crowd; and Effie had to take his proffered arm, and hurry off.

CHAPTER IX.

SEVEN years' indulgence in feelings of which she would have considered the betrayal a disgrace, and for which she had never even expected a return, had so strengthened Effie's natural pride and reserve, that, when the unexpected return became a certainty, she was unable to open her heart to receive it. She could not believe in the reality of Gerard's love. She could not forget the habit of concealing her own love. Not one of those around her understood her real feelings. Harold thought the engagement a good thing for his brother, and fancied that Effie had entered into it more for Gerard's sake than for her own. Gerard had much the same belief; but he was entirely opposed to Jessie's opinion that Effie was too practical and unromantic for it to be of any consequence whom she married. Gerard rightly considered Effie very romantic; but he held that her romance was shown in an intense desire to sacrifice herself for others. In only one person did Effie unreservedly confide. This person was her aunt Elizabeth, whose ready understanding of her feelings had early won the girl's affection.

“ DEAREST AUNT,

“ Gateshill, June 13th.

“ Though no one else is to know, I must tell *you* that I am engaged to marry Gerard. I hardly know how it came to pass. A year ago if any one had told me that Gerard would ever care for me *in that way*, I should have laughed at them. As soon as he is away from me now, I begin to fancy that it is all a dream, and that I shall wake to the old one-sided, hopeless feeling which I have carried about with me as long as I can remember. I sometimes thought at Gourock that you had found out my secret—was it so? It amuses me to see that he imagines I do not care for him as much as he does for me. Somehow I could not tell him of my childish folly; and it seemed all to come about so quietly and naturally, that any sentimental revelations would have been out of place. So he believes that he is a most romantic lover, and that I am a self-sufficient, cold-hearted creature, who just endures him for the sake of his devotion. I see no reason for dispelling this delusion. *I* know the truth: that he is an affectionate, warm-hearted fellow, who has got so used to me that he cannot do without me, and that I—Aunt, I know you will cry out ‘Idolatry!’ but as I will not tell Gerard, I must relieve my full heart by telling *you*, that it positively frightens me to feel how much I love him. It seems to me that, all the time I have been growing up from a little child, this love for him has so

grown into my very nature that it has become an actual part of myself, and that it could no more be taken from me than my nerves or my muscles could. And yet I do not in the least consider him perfect. I can see that he has faults, but I am afraid that I love his faults. Oh, Aunt! is this a very shocking confession? I fear you will think so. But then I know you can feel for me. It will not be the least good for you to tell me not to give way to idolatry. If I could not conquer my feelings when they were so utterly uncalled for, and so hopeless of return, it is quite impossible that I should do so now that I seem to have some sort of *right* to care for him.

I cannot write about every-day matters after this love-sick damsel's rhapsody, and I must not inflict upon you any more such nonsense, so good-bye, dearest Aunt. Don't think me a very great fool, if you can help it, and don't, please, tell me that I can help being such a fool. I hear Gerard's step in the garden. What is it in aunt Euphemia's pretty song?—'His very step has music in't, as he comes up the stair.' Don't think from this that he wears creaking boots.

"Now really good-bye.

"Ever your loving,

"EFFIE.

"Don't mention my engagement, even to aunt Janet or aunt Euphemia."

“To whom are you scribbling, little woman?—*my* little woman,” asked Gerard, coming in, and making his greeting with his loving eyes only.

“To poor aunt Elizabeth.”

“Have you told her about it?”

“About what?”

“About what has happened to you and me.”

“Yes. I could not keep it from her.”

“Why should you? Why should not every one know?”

“Please not, Gerard—not yet, at any rate.”

“I verily believe you want to keep a loophole to escape through,” said Gerard, gaily. “But it won’t do. However carefully you may keep our engagement private, you will be just as great a scoundrel if you are false to it.”

“Greater, I think,” returned Effie. “There is some courage in being false before the eyes of all the world; but to be false to a private engagement would be despicably mean and cowardly.”

“Yes, you are right,” said Gerard. “How is it, Effie, that you always manage to hit the right nail on the head with such a bang?”

Effie laughed. Gerard continued. “There is one person I think we ought to tell, Effie—George Monro.”

“Very well, if you like,” returned Effie, after a little hesitation.

“Don’t think I say so from jealousy of him, Effie,” added Gerard, hastily. “I know I made a great fool of myself about that, but you need not fear it can ever happen again. I am not such a sneak as to doubt you now that I have your word. But I think George ought to be told, because—because— The fact is, Effie, I fancy it was only a race between us which should speak first.”

“I don’t believe it, Gerard. Mr. Monro and I happened to have a good many interests in common, and so he liked talking with me, but I am sure that was all.”

“I am sure that was not all, and so I don’t want the poor fellow to go on cherishing false hopes. By-the-by, Effie, I have thought since that I was the most selfish and conceited dog that ever existed, to come between you and him. He deserved you ten thousand times better than I do, and he would make you ten million times a better husband. Just think of his advantages! See how splendidly handsome he is! Consider his noble character, and his intellectual, highly-cultivated mind! Then his worldly position. Why, he could buy us all up, and never miss the money! And he is heart and soul a clergyman! and you were made for a clergyman’s wife. I declare it is a shame! I say, Effie, shall I release you?”

“What! Are you tired of me already?” cried Effie.

For all answer, Gerard aimed at her a paper pellet, which he had been twisting up in his fingers whilst he talked. Presently he went on, more seriously : "If you were to throw me over, and to marry George, I don't know to what depths of wickedness I might not sink. You cannot imagine a blacker villain than I felt during those three days after the Monros' party. Effie, don't you despise a man who can be so possessed by the green-eyed monster?"

"Yes," answered Effie, frankly.

"*Do* you despise me? I tell you what, Effie, if I were ever to feel sure that you thoroughly despised me, I should be utterly desperate. I remember when I was a bit of a boy, and you were a mite about as high as my knee, I used constantly to be kept out of mischief by the fear of one of your cutting reproofs. Do you recollect the day I harnessed the kitten to your water-cart, and you were so angry that you flew at me like a baby-tigress, and then went off into fits of crying, and sobbed out, over and over again, 'I hate a cruel coward!' Oh, how small I felt! And how utterly wretched I was till we had made it up! I say, by-the-by, where are your tyrants? How is it that, for once in a way, I find poor little slavie free?"

"Don't, Gerard, don't talk in that way. I am not a slave. I love to work for the children. Hannah and Cook have taken them out this afternoon."

“Then we can have some quiet talk. Hurrah! First: we have to settle about George. Shall I tell him?”

“Wait till you see him again. He will be at Cambridge now for months, and he will have quite got over any fancy—if any ever existed except in your imagination—before he comes back.”

“Very well. Yes, at any rate the blow will be softened by absence. You are right, small woman—which is only saying that you are yourself. Now, another thing: when are we going to be married?”

“Going to be married! ‘But what shall we have for to eat, eat, eat?’”

“You mercenary little monster! ‘The little god of love’ will ‘turn the spit, spit, spit.’”

“That he will not; and just think of your appetite.”

“Impertinence! Well, look here! I have got fifty pounds a-year, and you have got the same. Can’t we live on a hundred a-year?”

“If we could manage without clothing, or a house, we might.”

“What a bore it is that I must give up my Fellowship! It is an absurd arrangement—the Fellows would be much happier and better with wives. Well, shall I take Orders?”

“For the sake of a livelihood, Gerard?”

“No; I was only joking. But really, Effie, I have

been thinking again about it. With you to keep me up, I don't see why I need disgrace the office. If *I* am not exactly fit for a clergyman, *you* are so fit for a clergyman's wife that you would carry me through with you, and your excellence would cover my deficiencies."

"No, Gerard," said Effie, rather sadly. "It won't do. We might manage to deceive ourselves, but in fact it would really be from motives of expediency. We have neither of us the right feeling on the subject."

"*You* have not, Effie?"

"No. It is the externals of a clergyman's life which attract me; and it is not the externals we ought to think of."

"No; true. I suppose we must give it up, then. But I should so like to see you, in a cotton dress and thick boots, with a basket on your arm, visiting about amongst the poor cottages. And how glorious it would be once a-week to have the privilege of mounting up high, and preaching at you for twenty minutes or so, in return for all your sermons to me!"

"Decidedly you shall not take Orders!" cried Effie.

"Then I must turn all my attention to drawing. But I am not going to be contented with my present low branch of art. I shall get Harold to give me some lessons in water-colours; and I mean to go

abroad with George in the autumn, and study in some of the foreign galleries. If we are not to marry at once, and trust to the love that I'm so 'rich in' to 'make a fire in the kitchen'—it would do it, too, if you were not such an iceberg. If you would meet me, not half, but half a quarter of the way, I am sure we could manage the kitchen-fire between us. But what was I saying when this question of fuel arose?"

"You were announcing some desperate resolve."

"Yes. I cannot stay hanging about here, and seeing you act as under—underer—underest nursemaid. I don't want to quarrel with Harold—indeed, I know the old fellow is not to blame—and I can't hit a woman; but I shall pitch into some one if I have to bear it much longer."

"Nonsense, Gerard; I like it."

"That's the worst of it. I wish you would revolt; what fun it would be to see Jessie's amazement! I hear her voice now. Depend upon it, she is coming to set you some awful task. Come into the garden, quick!" He caught Effie's hand, and dragged her to the farther end of the little garden. Here they sat talking in low tones till Jessie's voice was heard at the window, calling, "Effie! Effie!"

Gerard could not induce Effie not to answer; and Jessie soon came towards them, looking hot and vexed.

"Here you are!" she cried; "I have been hunting

for you everywhere. It is very pleasant for you to be able to idle away your time with Gerard, whilst we are all toiling away in the heat. I suppose this will be always the case now. And the misfortune is that you have spoilt those children so abominably that nobody can do anything with them."

"Have the children come in?" asked Effie.

"Yes, hours ago. And such a noise there has been ever since! I have been trying to get a little rest in my room, but it was quite impossible. There is Baby crying incessantly. Hannah says he is not well, but I believe it is nothing but temper; and Walter keeps fretting and fidgeting, 'I want Auntie! I want Auntie!' and there is Davie shouting out some of those vulgar Ethiopian songs that you taught him, Gerard. And all the time here are you two enjoying yourselves as if you were all alone in the world. I think you might have some consideration for me, Effie, though you *are* engaged to be married, especially when you know how very unwell I am to-day."

"I will go to the children," said Effie, meekly; her happiness had made her very meek.

"You shall not," cried Gerard, laying his hand on her shoulder. "Harold, come here!" he shouted, at the top of his voice, as Harold's head appeared at his studio window. "Stay, Jessie," Gerard added; "I *will* have this question set at rest."

Harold appeared, looking rather surprised.

"Harold, is it your wish that Effie should be a slave to your children?" asked Gerard.

"Most certainly not."

"Do you consider that her position in your house calls upon her to spend all her time and strength in positively menial labours for you and yours?"

"Most certainly not. Effie's time should be entirely at her own disposal."

"Effie—answer me frankly—how much time have you at your own disposal during the day?"

"Gerard, do not!" exclaimed Effie, in great distress. "You know I like to spend my time as I do."

"Do you like that Jessie should speak to you as she did just now? Harold! Though Effie, in her generous self-devotion, is willing to bear any amount of oppression, I will not bear it for her. Would to Heaven that I were in a position to remove her from it! But as that cannot be at present, I think I have a right to demand from my brother that my future wife should not be insulted in his house."

"Insulted!" cried Harold, with unusual vehemence. "You must know, Gerard, that you cannot be more anxious than I am to shield Effie from the slightest annoyance."

"I do believe it, Harold; and therefore I cannot think that you know what she is subject to."

"From whom?" asked Harold, faintly.

“From your wife.”

“Jessie! What does all this mean?” asked Harold, with such a harassed expression that Gerard almost repented that he had spoken.

“It means that you are all in league against me,” answered Jessie, beginning to cry. “Gerard always hated me, and now Effie is joined with him, and they are teaching my own children to be my enemies. Whose doing can it be that, when I went into the nursery just now, Davie called out, ‘Go away, Mamma, we don’t want you—we want Auntie!’ and Walter added, ‘Nasty, ugly Mamma! we want pretty Auntie?’”

Gerard could hardly help laughing; but Effie looked terribly distressed, and Harold seemed quite overcome.

“What a charming family group!”

“*‘Felices ter et amplius
Quos irrupta tenet copula, nec, malis
Divulsus querimoniis,
Supremâ citius solvet, amordie,’*”

cried a voice from the next garden, and Mrs. Mortlake’s head appeared over the paling. “It is fortunate for you that I found you all here; for, otherwise, I was intending to make a raid this evening into the delightful privacy of your social circle.”

Having said this, she suddenly dipped out of sight. Reappearing in a few minutes, during which the

“charming family group” had looked at each other, in considerable embarrassment, she continued :

“I really could not stand it. I was positively forced to shelter myself for a few seconds from the full blaze of Mrs. Archer Yonge’s loveliness—heightened as it is by that charming colour. I have hardly yet recovered from the dazzling effect of such a sudden flash of light, after the outer darkness in which—— And where are the sweet little-ones? Their pretty, innocent faces are all that is needed to make—— You see, Mr. Gerard, I quite class you with the family—indeed, I am much mistaken if—— Mr. Archer Yonge! what a treat you have afforded us! I have just returned from the Water-colour Exhibition. I never saw such freshness, such breadth of colouring, with such minute details! You know I am no lover of fine speeches, but you must permit me to express—— Oh, pray, Mrs. Archer Yonge, do not move! That attitude is all that the artist’s eye of your—— Tell me, Mr. Yonge, did you ever see any colour equal to that which now adorns the cheeks of your lovely bride—wife, I should say—ten thousand pardons!—I forget the flight of time! Miss Effie, I wish you had some of your sister’s roses. ‘Why so pale and wan,’ fair lady? ‘Prythee, why so pale?’ Pardon me, ye shades of the poet, for presuming to alter one word of the—— But I must to business—‘*Καίρουν ηνωθι*’ was very wise

counsel. I must not waste any of those moments, Mr. Yonge, which might enrich the world with such precious fruits. I heard you say the other day that you should be compelled to move, on account of the increasing need of space for your charming little family. Forbid it, ye heavens! that an ignoble question of space should rob our firmament of the brightest stars! Mr. Yonge, my humble abode is entirely at your service. Do with it as you will—only let me be able to revel in the proud thought that my roof has overspread one of the brightest ornaments of our artistic circles, and also the *very* brightest ornament of social and domestic life;” a bow, first to Harold, and then to Jessie. “To open an entrance,” Mrs. Mortlake continued, “will be the work of a few hours, and you will then have four additional rooms at your disposal. For myself, I only desire to retain the kitchens and the ground-floor; and *my* gain in the arrangement will be beyond all—Mrs. Archer Yonge, on my knees I implore you, do not reject my petition;” another abrupt disappearance.

“Do I understand aright, Mrs. Mortlake——”

“You understand aright always, Mr. Yonge, and I am, therefore, convinced that you now understand how inadequate my feeble words are to express the depth and intensity of my admiration for——”

“But, Mrs. Mortlake——”

“True, very true, Mr. Yonge. As you so eloquently

and profoundly observe, admiration is one of those delicate sentiments whose bloom is lost in the endeavour to express what, in its native purity, is capable only of being felt. Then you grant my prayer?"

"Really, Mrs. Mortlake——"

"Thank you! I thought you would not be obdurate. We will dispense with all ceremony. Remember, the obligation is on my side. What have I done, oh, ye propitious fates! that I should be chosen as the means of affording greater accommodation to that youthful progeny who are destined hereafter to be their country's pride? Mr. Yonge, my tongue fails to perform its office when I would express—— Here come my young friends. Bright as a summer's day—gay as the lark carolling——"

The sentence was cut short by a violent scream from Walter. The two little boys had come running down the garden as fast as their toddling legs would carry them, pursued by Hannah, with the baby in her arms. Effie heard with alarm that the children were both shouting, "Auntie! Auntie!" Half way along their course, Walter was caught in Nurse's disengaged hand; and he forthwith set up a shriek, as unlike the carolling of a lark as it is possible to imagine. Davie, unchecked, fled on, and threw himself, panting and breathless, upon his aunt's neck. Hardly knowing what it was best to do, Effie took the boy in her arms, and carried him back to his brother, who instantly clung on

to her neck behind, as Davie had done in front ; and, thus doubly laden, she slowly made her way in to the house.

“Davie,” said Effie, when she had deposited her burden on the floor of the little play-room, “I am very sorry that you have been a naughty boy.”

“Davie naughty !” repeated the child, opening his blue eyes wide with astonishment.

“Yes ; you were very unkind to poor dear Mamma.”

“Poor dear Auntie !” said Davie, clambering on her knee, and throwing his arms round her neck.

“No ; Davie, I cannot love a naughty boy.”

“Auntie love Davie,” he asserted, in his most insinuating tone.

“No ; I cannot love a little boy who is not good to his mamma.”

“Mamma not good,” retorted Davie, slyly ;
“Mamma cries.”

“Ugly Mamma,” added Walter, with childish persistency.

Effie thought it unsafe to pursue the subject any farther, so she changed the conversation. In a few minutes Gerard came in, laughing heartily.

“That woman will be the death of me,” he said.
“It is too much when she calls that young vagabond’s screeching the ‘carolling of a lark,’ and talks about our ‘happy family group’—it was not very happy at that moment, was it, Effie ? I was sorry for what I said when I saw how cut up poor Harold was. You

young rascals, are you not ashamed to make your poor auntie carry you both at once? You will break her back some day—you will make her ill—and then you will be sorry.”

“Me make poor Auntie well,” said Davie, again having recourse to the violent caress which he considered a panacea for every ill.

“Davie is so absurdly like what you were, Gerard,” observed Effie. “He thinks that a few insinuating words and looks can make up for anything.”

“Used I to think that?” said Geard, laughing. “Now, Davie and Walter,” he continued, “you are to take great care of poor little Auntie, and not ever let her carry great heavy boys about. You would not like to hurt Auntie, would you?”

“No,” cried Davie, stoutly.

“No,” said Walter, looking very much inclined to whimper.

“You love dear little Auntie, don’t you?”

“Me love Auntie *so much*,” said Davie, fervently, stretching out his arms to their farthest extent, and then clasping them round Effie’s neck again, at the risk of strangling her.

“I love Auntie! I love Auntie!” cried Walter, scrambling to his feet, and tottering along till he threw himself, sobbing with emotion, on to his aunt’s lap.

“And I love Auntie! I love Auntie!” echoed Gerard, imitating the little boys, and throwing his arms round the whole group. Then he suddenly

caught hold of Davie, and bore him away in triumph.

Just then Harold entered. "What a tumult!" he said, good-naturedly. "Halloa, my boys!" He kissed the two children, and then Effie, saying affectionately, "Poor little sister! Have I let her slave for me? What a great brute of a brother!"

He held out his hand to Gerard, "Thank you for telling me, Gay. It will be all right now. We will take Mrs. Mortlake's four rooms, and have another servant; and Jessie says that Effie shall never do anything but play-work. Poor Jessie is so much occupied, and is so often unwell, that she cannot think of everything—she would be the last person wilfully to oppress any one." Harold sighed heavily as he finished speaking.

"I am sorry I made a row," said Gerard, penitently; "only it was for Effie's sake."

"You have got a treasure, Gay—make the most of her!"

"I know I have—I wish I were more worthy of her!—and, Hay, dear old boy, you are the best old fellow in the world!" Gerald threw his arm caressingly round his brother's neck as he spoke. Harold looked kindly at him, and then left the room without speaking.

"Poor dear old fellow!" said Gerard.

"Poor dear old fellow!" echoed Walter, with a comical look of intelligence.

CHAPTER X.

“EFFIE, come here!” cried Gerard, standing in the doorway of the little play-room, as Effie was coming downstairs, on an autumn evening. “He has not come yet,” he added, almost in a whisper, as he drew her into the room, and shut the door. “I am in such a fright!”

“What about?” asked Effie.

“If he should look at you as he used—with those live coals of eyes—I shall feel so awfully guilty.”

“I am sure it is all your fancy, Gerard.”

“I wish it were. I feel as if I must have been treacherous towards him; and yet I was not bold to know what he never told me.”

“Certainly not,” said Effie.

“But I *did* know. I wish I had confessed to him at once.”

“You will see that your agitation is quite uncalled for.”

“No. George Monro is the last man who would

be inconstant. There he is!" and Gerard jumped about the room as though the boards were red-hot plates. Effie stood laughing.

"You little heartless imp!" cried Gerard; "you don't care what misery you inflict! I can't tell him. I can't tell him!"

"Do not tell him, then."

"He *must* know. How I should have hated him if our cases had been reversed! I don't suppose George can hate—but I am sure he can suffer. I wish I hadn't done it!"

"Done what?"

"Got myself into this scrape."

"You can easily get out of it," said Effie, slipping her engagement-ring off her finger, and holding it towards him.

"Do you want George to give you one in its place?" asked Gerard. "Put it on, quick!" he cried, suddenly. "It is a bad omen to take off a wedding or engagement-ring. By-the-by, that may give him a hint. Effie, you must not mind my being more lover-like than you usually allow me to be before people—that will show him."

"Do you propose to sit with your arm round my waist, like a valet with a lady's maid, or that we should walk about hand in hand, like Swiss peasants on the stage?"

"I don't know," replied Gerard, looking puzzled.

“At any rate we can go into the room together—that may do something.”

“Do you want to hide your face in my dress, as Davie and Walter do?”

“I wish I could. But it would look so awkward; you are such an inconveniently small woman.”

“You mean that *you* are such an inconveniently large man. Now we must go—dinner will be ready, and we shall be scolded.”

As Effie entered the room, George gave a quick, eager glance at her, which made Gerard groan within himself. The state of things during dinner was extremely awkward, and the evening was still more trying. George at once renewed his former marked attention to Effie, hardly taking his eyes from her, and making her the object of all his conversation. This offended Jessie, and she would not volunteer a word, and only gave short answers when addressed. Harold was always silent, and now he was worried by Jessie's manner. Gerard was nearly tongue-tied also, and, instead of being demonstrative towards Effie, as he had threatened, he seemed afraid to speak to, or even to look at her, and did nothing but cast nervous glances at George. It was a great relief to all but the guest when the party separated for the night. As Effie was going upstairs Gerard called after her, “Effie, come and get me that book!” Effie knew that he wanted some private talk; and she

followed him into the little room usually set apart for that purpose.

"There! You see I am right!" said Gerard, as soon as they were out of hearing of the others.

"He has always that eager manner," returned Effie.

"Always with *you*. But you should see him with other girls! Harold himself could not be more indifferent."

"I think you are determined to make me vain, Gerard."

"Well, it *is* the most extraordinary thing that a small, insignificant, brown woman should have been able to bewitch two——"

"Fine, handsome young men like you and Mr. Monroe," said Effie, laughingly finishing the sentence for him.

"Exactly," assented Gerard. "What is the secret of your power, little one?"

"Simply the power of your imagination," returned Effie. "First, you fancied that you cared for me yourself, and then that Mr. Monroe did the same."

"You incorrigible sceptic! What makes you always doubt my love, Effie?"

"I don't doubt its existence—only its strength."

"Shall I show you its strength as Davie does?"

"No, no," cried Effie, retreating to the farthest corner of the room.

"I wish I were not going away for so long," said Gerard, in a sentimental tone.

"Only for six months," remarked Effie, cheerfully.

"*Only* for six months'! What shall I do for six months without my little 'guide, philosopher, and friend'?"

"You will have Mr. Monro to keep you out of mischief."

"You don't care a bit about my going. I believe you are glad to get rid of me. Are you, Effie?"

"No."

"Are you sorry?"

"Yes."

"Very sorry?"

"Yes."

"Very, *very* sorry?"

"Yes."

"Utterly in despair?"

"No."

"You wicked, cold-hearted, insufferable little fiend!" He made a dash at her; Effie eluded it, and darted from the room. She met George in the hall. He held out his hand for another "good-night."

"You cannot imagine, Miss Garnock, what a pleasure it is to me to see you again," he said, in low, tender tones; "I have lived on this hope ever since June."

Effie fled up to her room, rather inclined to join in Gerard's wonder at her powers of attraction.

If Gerard could have seen into Effie's heart after he and his companion had departed the next morning, he would not have had to complain that she did not care about his going. It seemed to her that a sudden chill and darkness had fallen on her daily life, and that the six months which she had called "*only* six months" would be a kind of Dead Sea, of which, at present, she could not see the farther shore. A letter from Gerard was the first ray of light.

" Paris, November 23rd.

"MY DEAREST LITTLE WOMAN,

"I have done it! When I had lost sight of your face at the gate,—I think, just at last, there *was* a little feeling in that stony countenance; but perhaps it was only sympathy with my grief, for you have a kind heart, cold as it is—Well, when the ruthless Hansom had torn us apart, and was bowling along towards London, George broke out on the subject of your charms—'What dignity!'—dignity in four feet eleven inches!—'What grace!'—grace in a graceless imp that won't even pretend to be sorry when her betrothed is parted from her 'it may be for years; it may be for ever!' 'What sensibility!'—sensibility! about as much as in the stones our wheels were grinding! He went on raving in this manner for some time, till at last he got to: 'I cannot imagine how you can consider her plain' (Mind, *I* am not responsible for this—*he* said it, and it was a most

unwarranted accusation—I never said you were *plain* ; I may have said you were *ugly*). He went on : ‘ I cannot imagine how any man with taste and feeling can have been so much in her society, and not be over head and ears in love with her.’ I saw there was no escape now. Now for it, I thought—now or never ! So I looked resolutely out at the wheel on my side, and said, ‘ But, my dear fellow, I am.’ I heard a kind of gurgling sound, and thought he had gone off in a fit, but I dared not look round. At last he said, ‘ You are what ?’ ‘ Over head and ears in love with her.’ ‘ And she ?’ Poor fellow ! His voice sounded as if he were under the wheels. ‘ We are engaged,’ I said, as calmly as I could, and then pretended to think the linch-pin was coming out. I never once looked round till we were crossing London Bridge—where there was a tremendous block—and I never heard a sound from him, so I rather expected to find him dead when we should arrive at the station. However, in the midst of the confusion, I heard his voice—forced and slow, but quite calm—‘ I wish you joy.’ He held out his hand, and I clutched it, ‘ Heaven grant you may both be very happy !’ Effie ! I declare to you, if it would have been any good, I should have liked to transfer you to him on the spot, rather than see his dear old face so white, and drawn, and hear him speak in that heartrending tone. To think that of us two sitting in that cab, he, who deserves the

best of everything, should have lost all he cares for in the world, and that I, who deserve nothing, should be the one to have robbed him! I think he must have seen how awfully cut up I was—I know the tears were in my eyes, for nothing would keep them back. He held my hand for a minute, and said, ‘Thank you for telling me;’ and then I managed somehow to make him understand that we did not wish any one else to know; and then we were at the station, and nothing more passed between us.

“Oh, Effie! what a man you have lost, for a weak fool of a fellow who is not worthy to hold a night-light to him!

“We had a very good passage across the Channel. I kept my eyes on George all the time; for, though I knew *he* would never be guilty of such an act, I could not help thinking that in his place *I* should be immensely tempted to jump overboard. It was twelve o’clock when we arrived here, and now it is half-past two. I shall despatch this the first thing in the morning. Of course I will write again when we have seen something of the place. Of course I shall write again and again, till you are sick of my letters. And do you write to me very often. Don’t let Jessie or the children impose upon you. If I get short letters, or few, I shall know you have been put into the mill again, and I shall come home instantly to rescue you. I have only been away twenty hours,

and I am already beginning to weary for a word from my darling little Guardian Angel. Write—write—write! If you don't want me home at once—write! If you do want me home at all—write! I think you do want me a little. Say something kind and pretty to me, to throw a light over all I see here. Let me have a good, dutiful letter on Saturday.

“Love to the slave-driver, and much love to the man-slave, and more than you can think of to the poor little slave-girl,—my dearest and best.

“Ever your own,

“GAY.”

Gerard's appeal for tenderness *in word*, was of little avail. What can avail against Nature? Some characters are as unalterably fixed at twenty as others at forty, and Effie's character was of the former class. It was impossible for her to be demonstrative. There was not an hour in her life—not a thought in her heart—which was not more or less devoted to Gerard. But nothing of this was shown in her letters when he was away, or in her words when he was with her. The surface-current only of her daily life was presented to his view. The hidden springs flowing from the depths of her love for him were known to herself alone. So poor Gerard got no “pretty” speeches, but only “dutiful” letters, in answer to the outpourings of his affectionate, trans-

parent heart. And all the time he was living in the present with the utmost relish, and Effie was living only on the future which should bring him back to her. Certainly, poor girl, there was not much enjoyment to be got out of *her* present—excepting the enjoyment of doing and suffering—both of which verbs have their charm for some persons. Gerard's anticipations of Effie's being imposed upon in his absence were only too well founded, as he began to suspect before he had been three months away. His suspicions were communicated to his brother in the following letter:—

“Florence, February 14th.

“DEAR HAY,

“As soon as you receive this—which will be a about three o'clock in the afternoon, I suppose—lay down your pencil, or your brush, and, shaking yourself out of the high regions of art down to the low level of common life, go at once to the nursery, the play-room, or the drawing-room. You will find that Jessie is lying down, that Hannah is attending upon her, that the Cook is cleaning the scullery, and Martha is cleaning the plate; and you will find Effie with Baby in her arms, Davie on her back, and Walter clinging to her dress. Or you will find her being Davie's horse, or putting Baby to sleep, or struggling with Walter in one of his passions. Or you will find her ironing Jessie's 'fine things,' as they

call them, or mending your socks, or stitching away at the children's clothes, with an aching back, and aching fingers, and aching eyes. I know something of the sort is going on, because I have not had my usual letter from her; and it is not in her nature to neglect any one, unless some one else is taking more than their share of work out of her. Put a stop to this, there's a good fellow! Hire another servant, and I will pay her wages. Or send the brats to a boarding-school—or, if they are too young for that, drop them at the Foundling—the children there have every comfort, and the best of training and instruction. If, when I come back, I find Effie thin and wan, I'll smiffigate the whole lot of them, and you and Jessie also.

“I enclose a few sketches of costume, etc. If you think them worth anything, see if you can find a purchaser, and I will undertake to transfer them to wood as soon as I come home. I have done about two dozen in the same style. George likes them, and so does an artist friend of his to whom I showed them. We go on to Rome next Monday, having worked Florence well.

“Love to Jessie and the small fry. Kiss my own little fry for me. George begs to be very kindly remembered to you all.

“Your affectionate brother,

“G. A. YONGE.”

Harold received his brother's letter about an hour later than Gerard had anticipated. He could not lay down his brush, or his pencil, for the day was so dark that he had not been able to use either, and was now writing by lamp-light. He obeyed the other injunctions, and went at once to the drawing-room. No one there. The play-room—also untenanted. In the room in Mrs. Mortlake's house, which was used as the day-nursery, he found Hannah, sitting quietly at work. The baby was kicking on the floor, crowing gently to himself, and the two elder children were perched up, one at each side of the window, peering intently out through the fast-falling snow. All this looked most satisfactory. Harold thought he would write at once to Gerard, and let him know how mistaken he had been. He had a romp with his youngest child, and then turned to the two little boys, who had never stirred from the window.

“Why, my rascals! Are you looking for diamonds in the snow?”

“Me looking for Auntie,” answered Davie.

“Poor Auntie so cold,” added Walter, piteously.

“Auntie! Surely Auntie is not out to-day! What do they mean, Hannah?”

“Well, sir, Missus didn't think as Jones made up her drops right last time, so Miss Garnock has gone to the chemist in Oxford Street.”

“Where is your mistress?”

"Lying down, as far as I know, sir."

"Papa," cried Davie, "when will Auntie come back?"

"Papa, go fetch Auntie," said Walter, in a peremptory tone.

"Papa" was too disturbed in mind to answer them. He went at once to Jessie's room—not without some inward trembling.

"Harold! How could you come in so suddenly? You have startled me so!" cried Jessie, from her bed.

"Why has Effie gone out in the snow, Jessie?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I was asleep—how could you disturb me in that violent manner?"

"Then Effie has not gone for you?"

"For me? Oh dear, how bad you have made my head! Yes, by-the-by, she has gone for me to Bell's to get those drops made up—you know I thought Jones must have made some mistake—the mixture he sent was so very nauseous."

"Could no one but Effie go?"

"Would you have wished me to go?"

"One of the servants might have gone."

"Martha is doing some work for me; and you and Gerard object to Effie having charge of the children, so Hannah could not leave them; and of course Cook could not be spared in the afternoon."

"Better to have spared all the servants than let Effie go out on such a day as this!"

“What a fuss you make about Effie now! Ever since she has been engaged you have seemed to think her too precious to be exposed to the slightest hardship or exertion. I believe you would not be so agitated if *I* were out in the snow.”

“I am responsible to Gerard for Effie. If I were to suffer you to run any risk, it would be at my own expense.”

“You mean that my death would be a trifle compared with Effie’s.”

“To lose either of you would be such a trifle as would break my heart,” returned Harold.

“You put Effie with me!” cried Jessie, violently. “You would mourn for her as much as for me!”

“I have said, Jessie, that during Gerard’s absence his treasure is in my charge; and if it were to suffer through my neglect I could never hold up my head again.”

“What grand language to be wasted on a girl having gone out in a little snow!”

“The snow is more than a foot deep in our garden, Jessie—you may imagine what it is where it has drifted.”

“Well, she is not going over a mountain pass: a snow-drift in London is not likely to hurt any one.”

“Harold! Is there anything the matter?” cried Effie, turning very pale as she entered the room, and

saw Harold standing by his wife's bed, with a grave, sad face.

"No, nothing, now," replied Harold; "only I was greatly vexed to find you were out this bitterly cold day."

"I did not know the weather was so bad," said Jessie, half apologetically. "How wet you are!"

"Go to the nursery, and take your outer coverings off," said Harold, following Effie from the room. "I will tell Martha to light a fire in your room, and you must go to bed at once."

"Nonsense, Harold!" cried Effie; "I shall be quite comfortable as soon as I have got rid of these dripping petticoats."

"Effie dear, to please me, will you do as I say?"

"I will do anything to please you, Harold. I will lie in bed for a week if you wish it—but I cannot see the necessity."

"There, don't stay here any longer! Run up to Hannah—the boys are looking eagerly for Auntie. And then mind you go to bed. What will Gerard say if we let you take cold? Stop a moment! I have something for you from Gerard;" he caught hold of her wet shoulders, and kissed her.

"Gerard did not send *that*!" cried Effie, flushing crimson.

"Yes, he did. Are you very angry?"

Effie laughed, and ran away. Harold sat down and wrote to his brother:

“DEAR GAY,

“When your letter arrived Effie was doing none of the things you mentioned. She was toiling along Oxford Street with a heavy medicine-bottle in her hand, up to her knees in slush, and covered with thickly-falling snow. She came home wet through. This is how I fulfil my trust, and guard the treasure which you have left in my hands. I can only say it shall never happen again—and I do not think it will happen again, after what I have said on the subject. You have given me no sinecure in the charge of one who *will* sacrifice herself, and, unfortunately, others are only too ready to accept of the sacrifice.

“I think the sketches will do, and I hope Mr. Finn will think the same.

“Ever yours,

“HAROLD A. YONGE.”

It was another three months before Gerard relieved Harold of his charge. The six months of his absence had seemed like six years to Effie; but so little of this longing for his return appeared in her welcome, that Gerard declared, half in earnest, that he did not believe she was even pleased to see him. He was greatly improved by his foreign tour. He had grown more manly and more self-reliant, and immediately on his return put in practice a most meritorious resolve to work in good earnest at his profession. He

had not been idle during his stay in the land of art, and he now set to work to carry forward the progress he had made. When he had enrolled himself as a student at the Royal Academy, and made some successful attempts at portrait-painting, to which branch of the art his talent seemed most to point, it appeared to all interested in him that his once wavering steps were at last steadily advancing on the straight road.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Gerard had laboured diligently at his profession for more than six months longer, he became very impatient to marry. "Harold, look here!" he said, one day; "I have paid all my debts, and have thirty pounds in hand; don't you think I should be quite justified in taking upon me the burden of this little woman?"

"What does 'this little woman' think?" asked Harold.

"That she would rather continue to be a burden to *you*," replied Effie.

"Why, Effie?" inquired Gerald, in a dissatisfied tone. "Why won't you trust yourself to me? Do you think I shall starve or beat you?"

"No. But I think you don't know how heavy a burden I should be to you."

"I know—six stone six."

"How great an encumbrance, then."

"I think an encumbrance is very much the same thing as a burden, is not it, Harold?"

"Don't tease her, Gerard," said Harold, kindly. "I know what she means. She means: Are you prepared to give up your bachelor habits—your cigars—your gay friends—your Opera-going, and to become a steady domestic character, on a *very* small income? Is not that it, Effie?"

"Yes, partly," answered Effie, timidly.

"Of course I am," asserted Gerard. "I smoke very little now, and I have not been to the Opera for a month. But if I indulged in such things to the greatest extent, I would give them up in a moment to have a little home of my own, and my own little wife in it. Don't you believe me, Effie?"

"Yes, Gerard," Effie answered, with some hesitation; "I believe you feel so now, but——"

"But what?"

"Suppose you should repent afterwards—when it will be too late?"

"Well, there would be Bluebeard's remedy. You seem to consider me much the same sort of character as Bluebeard. Harold, is not she too hard upon me? Am I such a bad fellow?"

"If you two are going to have a lovers' quarrel, I had better get out of the way," returned Harold.

"Are we to have a quarrel, Effie?" asked Gerard, when his brother had left the room.

"Certainly not."

"Then are you going to be reasonable?"

"Yes—reasonable and prudent," replied Effie.

"And prudence means shilly-shallying—to promise to marry me, and then to shirk keeping your word. That is not like you, Effie."

"And it is not true of me, Gerard."

"Then why do you talk of prudence, as if my wife would be exposed to some fearful risk? Why will you not have faith in me?"

"I *have* faith in you—a little."

"I know I am not a model man, like George Monro, or Harold," said Gerard, humbly; "but I am better than I was—more worthy of confidence."

"I always thought you worthy of confidence," returned Effie.

"Then prove it by confiding yourself to me."

"I think I proved it nearly two years ago."

"What! just by allowing me to come and walk with you occasionally. I believe you have a servant's idea of an engagement—that it consists in having a young man to walk with, without any intention of ever marrying him."

Effie laughed. "What do you wish me to do?" she asked.

"To marry me at once—in a few weeks."

"Without any of the usual preparations? 'Do you

wish to have a bride without a trousseau?' as Jessie said to Harold."

"Yes. What does it signify? I like your old frocks much better than I should new ones. I should like you to be married in the grey silk you wore at Chiswick *that* day."

"That poor old grey silk!"

"That dear old grey silk! much dearer to me than any of those new gowns which you are now projecting, and on which Miss Cricket will operate at a charge of eighteen-pence a day."

"There's the harm of having 'a young man to walk with;' he learns all the secrets of the domestic economy."

"There is no harm in that; it only convinces me how well you will manage in the little house in Steadham Lane, on which I have got my eye."

"Are your views so grand as to extend to a house?"

"Not all to ourselves. My house belongs to a widow, who lets three rooms—such jolly little bright, cosy rooms! I tell you what—you shall come and see them this afternoon! We shall be soon back from Harley Street."

"I dare say Jessie is getting ready now."

"Run along then. Clara will be out if we are not there early, and it would be a great bore to miss her."

"If I were an orthodox young lady, I should be jealous of your eagerness to see Miss Monro."

"I wish you would be—it would show some sort of feeling about me."

"About myself, you mean ; jealousy is nothing but selfishness."

"I must be horribly selfish then. How jealous I was once of George Monro ! Poor old fellow ! I suppose I must not ask him to be my 'best man ?' I say, Effie, I should like that you and I should walk quietly up the hill some morning, and get ourselves married ; and then come back, and spend the day in the garden, or the fields, and in the evening go to our little home at the widow's. Do you agree ?"

"Yes. I should like that plan much better than any state affair."

"And when shall we do it ?"

"Some day in the summer."

"No, no ; some day in the spring—the very beginning of spring."

"The first of April ?" asked Effie, laughing.

"No ; the first of March," returned Gerard.

"No ; the eleventh of June," said Effie.

"Why then ?"

"Because then we shall have been engaged two years."

"That is not for four months !"

"Four months are soon gone."

“ You promise to keep to that day—not to put me off again ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Then in the meantime I shall console myself with Clara Monro.”

“ Very well ; that will keep you out of Miss Cricket’s way.”

“ I suppose you will be always shopping and sewing.”

“ Yes, always. Ready, Jessie !” Effie cried, as her sister entered the room, in her bonnet and cloak. “ I must make haste.”

“ Stop, Effie. I find Hannah had been promised that she should go out this afternoon ; so you must stay with the children, if I am to go to Miss Monro.”

“ Very well,” said Effie, resignedly.

“ She cannot stay, Jessie,” cried Gerard. “ It will be of no use for any one to call on Clara if Effie does not. Hear what George says : ‘ I shall esteem it a great kindness if Mrs. Yonge will visit my sister whilst she is staying with the Welfords. I wish of all things that Clara should cultivate Miss Garnock’s friendship.’ ”

“ Oh, very well,” said Jessie, indignantly ; “ I need not trouble myself, then.”

“ The Monros were very kind and attentive to you when they were in town,” remarked Effie.

“ Yes ; I like the Monros,” Jessie replied, more

amiably. "But what is to be done? The children cannot be left alone."

"It does not at all signify about my going to-day, Gerard," said Effie. "A first call is always a stiff affair; and Miss Monro is sure to come here soon."

"Very well. Then I shall come back to take you to Steadham Lane. Let me see, we shall not be more than an hour and a half."

They were more than two hours gone; but when they returned Gerard declared that there was still time for the intended walk.

"Did you see Clara?" asked Effie, as soon as they had started.

"Yes. She was very sorry you had not come. I am going to bring her and Kate here to a tea-fight on Thursday."

"Is she as beautiful as ever?"

"Yes. Oh yes, quite," replied Gerard, in an embarrassed tone; and he continued very much preoccupied, and very unlike himself till they reached the widow's house. Everything strange in his manner disappeared then. The neat, pretty little rooms were all that could be desired, and Gerard was wild with delight at the idea of seeing Effie as the mistress of them.

Effie, in her undemonstrative fashion, was very happy also. Though Gerard might with justice complain that her manner showed a want of confidence

in him, she had, in reality, no such want of confidence. She never for a moment imagined that his affection was equal in intensity to her own; but neither did she for a moment doubt his truth. It never occurred to her that her own reserve might act as a check upon Gerard's feelings. But so it was, as he had never felt more forcibly than he did to-day. Gerard was no judge of character. With him there were no hidden depths, no intricacies of feeling. And as it was with himself, he believed it to be with others. What he saw he believed; what he could not see he never suspected. Once convinced that his jealousy of George Monro was quite unfounded, he had been, on the whole, tolerably well satisfied with the portion of love which Effie chose to show him. He supposed that girls never did feel as much as men in such cases. Jessie was always cool towards Harold, and yet there was no doubt that she loved him as much as she was capable of loving any one. Harold had long given up expecting any tenderness from Jessie; and he supposed he must do the same with regard to Effie. He had nothing else to complain of; she was all that could be wished in every other respect. Thus Gerard had reasoned with himself, and thus he had stifled his occasional yearning for some demonstration of affection on Effie's part. To-day a fresh impulse had been given to his lurking dissatisfaction. Still smarting under

Effie's reluctance to fix an early day for their marriage, he had again seen Clara Monro, after nearly two years' separation. At the time Clara had been in London before, he had been too much engrossed by his jealousy of George to see, as others did, of how much importance he was to George's sister. Consequently, he had never given a thought to the possible effect of the attention which, in his vexation with Effie, he had paid to Clara. George also, at that period, had been too much engrossed with his own feelings to notice the danger into which his sister was running. Quite unaware that the engagement between Gerard and Effie would affect Clara's happiness as well as his own, he never saw the necessity of breaking, as far as she was concerned, the promise of secrecy which he had given to Gerard. Thus it happened that Clara for two years had been fostering the most fallacious hopes; and thus it happened that when Gerard had again met Clara he had been startled to see in her a manifestation of such feeling as he had never seen in Effie. To do him justice, this at first caused him more embarrassment than pleasure. It made him feel guilty towards Clara, not towards Effie. But it also brought forcibly to his mind the extent of Effie's shortcomings. It was in this state of feeling that he took his promised wife to see their future home. Happily for him and for Effie, his elastic nature soon threw off any cause

of discomfort ; and before they left the cottage, he had forgotten all about Clara, and was feeling nothing but the sense of safety which Effie's strength of character always afforded him.

The little tea-party on the following Thursday served to revive all Gerard's trouble, and to confirm the suspicions which Effie had long entertained as to the state of Clara's affections. Clara was almost the counterpart of her brother George. Her feelings, like his, were unchecked by any respect for conventionalities ; and, as with him, every emotion shone out through her glowing dark eyes. Gerard's responsive nature could never withstand any flattery to his self-love ; and he appeared, certainly, on this occasion, more gratified by Clara's preference than was altogether becoming in an engaged man.

Miss Monroe had a beautiful voice, and sang with great taste and feeling. Immediately that the early tea was over, Gerard, who was passionately fond of music, opened the piano, and begged for his treat to begin.

"You will not find it a treat if you make Clara sing so soon after tea," observed Kate Monroe.

"You are forgetting your manners, Gerard," said Jessie, jokingly ; "our guest ought not to be asked to open the entertainment."

"Who will do it, then ?" inquired Gerard. "You do nothing in that way, and Effie only plays for dancing."

“You will waive etiquette, and play us something, will you not?” said Effie to Kate Monro.

Kate immediately sat down, and rattled off her last school “piece,” and then, without any pause, broke into a merry polka. Gerard was on his feet in a moment, and, catching Effie, whirled her about the room till she was breathless and giddy.

“I am not going to ask *you* to dance,” he said to Clara, as he deposited his exhausted partner on the sofa beside her. “You must keep your breath for better things.”

When Kate stopped, Gerard would wait no longer. “May not I ask you now?” he said to Clara.

“You may ask me whenever you like,” answered Clara.

“May I ask you *whatever* I like?”

The quick blush that overspread Clara’s face showed that she had given too deep a meaning to the careless question. Gerard, as well as Effie, saw how she had taken his words, and Effie knew that Gerard saw it—knew by his conscious, gratified face, and by his softened tone. “Will you promise to grant whatever I ask?” he said.

“Yes,” answered Clara, raising her glorious eyes to his for a moment, and then dropping them in confusion.

“Then sing ‘Kathleen O’More,’” said Gerard, in an entirely altered voice. Clara rose directly, and

went to the piano. Gerard, when he had placed the song for her, and arranged the lights, left Clara's side, and sat down beside Effie.

"This is *my* Kathleen," he whispered.

When the song was finished, he was up again, begging for another, and this time he stood by the singer. Another and another song followed, till Clara declared she could sing no more, and Gerard sought Effie out in her solitary corner, and begged her to play a waltz.

"One of your own old slow waltzes," he said. "Nobody can play waltzes like you can, little woman."

Effie's powers in this respect were tested by waltz after waltz, in which Gerard and Clara were the only performers, Kate having gone to see the children put to bed. At last Clara owned to being tired, and then it struck Gerard that the musician might not be quite proof against fatigue.

"Do your poor little fingers ache, Effie? We have had such capital waltzes! Clara is such a splendid dancer. I wish you could have seen her. Was it not a pretty sight to see us waltzing. Harold?" he asked, aloud.

"I did not look," replied Harold, coldly. "I know of old that Miss Monro dances well."

"And have you nothing to say of me?"

"I have seen you get on very well with Effie,"

replied Harold, in so pointed a manner that Gerard coloured deeply, and Effie felt very uncomfortable.

“I think we ought to be going home,” said Clara.
“I wonder what Kate is about.”

Effie was glad to escape in search of her, and Clara soon followed to put on her bonnet and cloak.

“I hope I was not hard upon your fingers, Effie,” said Gerard, running up the garden for a last word, after they had all taken leave. “I was a selfish brute to let you go on so long. I had no idea how the time went—it was so very pleasant,” and he sighed.

“Then my fingers are pleased to have worked in the service,” said Effie, cheerfully.

“Kind little fingers!” cried Gerard, pressing them to his lips, as he hurried away.

Effie resolutely drove away any dissatisfied feelings which arose at the recollection of that evening. She attributed whatever discomfort she had felt to the fact of not being able to satisfy Gerard’s love of music, and she did most deeply regret that she had never learnt to sing. She regretted this still more when, on subsequent evenings, Gerard went to the Welfords’ instead of coming to Gateshill, and Harold and Jessie began to notice his frequent absence.

When Gerard was making his excuses after one such occasion, Harold remarked, “Effie is very good to allow you so much freedom.”

“Freedom !” cried Gerard, rather fiercely. “What do you mean ?”

“I mean freedom. Your chain must be a very long one to allow of your behaving as you do to Miss Monro,” answered Harold, only half in joke.

Gerard looked alarmed : “Do *you* think so, Effie ? Do *you* see anything wrong in my behaviour ?”

“Nothing at all,” answered Effie, cordially. “And I cannot think what Harold means. Surely you are not bound to spend all your evenings here. I would not have you think so. Did Clara sing to you ?”

“Yes, most exquisitely,” answered Gerard.

Effie *did* wish that she could sing.

The next week Gerard had been to the Opera with the Welfords and Clara. Harold did not approve of this, and said, more sternly than he had ever before spoken to his brother, “I hope you are not making false pretences all this time, Gerard. I hope Miss Monro is aware of your true position.”

“False pretences !” echoed Gerard, flushing crimson all over his face. “What do you mean ? What is my true position ?”

“That of a man engaged to be married,” replied Harold, fixing his eyes on Gerard.

“I don’t think Clara does know of my engagement,” replied Gerard, with a nervous laugh.

“Your behaviour when she was here was not calculated to enlighten her,” remarked Harold.

"Effie would not have our engagement made public," pleaded Gerard.

"You ought to make it public now, however, as two months ago you were talking of being married this summer. At any rate, Miss Monro should be told," said Harold, still severe.

"Shall I tell her, Effie?" asked Gerard.

"Do as you like, Gerard. I do not fear your making 'false pretences,'" and Effie gave an indignant glance at Harold.

"Thank you, Effie," said Gerard, gratefully. "I am sorry Harold thinks so badly of me. Are you afraid for Clara's heart, Hay?" he asked, with somewhat forced unconcern.

"I am more afraid for your honour," replied Harold, as he left the room.

"What is the matter with Harold?" said Gerard. "I never knew him take up anything in this way before. Effie, tell me honestly—would you rather I should not go to the Welfords', or go about with them?"

"No—honestly, Gerard—I would much rather not have you tied to me with so tight a chain—to use Harold's metaphor."

"In fact, you would rather get rid of me occasionally?"

"Yes," replied Effie, gaily.

But from that time she did begin to feel rather

uneasy at Gerard's frequent absence from her in those hours which he formerly always spent with her, and at the evident increase of his intimacy with Clara Monro.

"Would you ladies like a little dissipation this evening?" asked Harold, coming into the play-room one morning, with an open letter in his hand. "Maddox has sent me orders for a box at the Haymarket. I don't think there is to be anything very special; but to us quiet folks a play is a play. Shall we go, Jessie?"

"Of course. How can you ask?"

"The box holds six, so I shall send one of the tickets to Gay—each ticket admits three. He can join us there with his two friends—whomsoever he may choose to take."

Effie had so seldom been in a theatre that she looked forward to the evening with almost as much pleasure as Jessie, who was in a state of childish excitement. But when they reached their box just as the curtain drew up, and found all the seats vacant, and when the first scene came to an end without Gerard having appeared, Effie's pleasurable anticipations gave place to disappointment and alarm.

"Why, there is Gerard opposite!" exclaimed Harold, as the second scene was just commencing.

Effie looked. Yes, there was Gerard, between Mrs. Welford and Miss Monro—not paying any

attention to the actors, but talking eagerly to Clara, whose face beamed with happiness.

“There must be some mistake,” said Harold, in a very dissatisfied tone. “What can have made him go to that side of the house? Who is with him, Effie?”

“Mrs. Welford and Clara Monro,” replied Effie. “I thought they were going to Richmond to-day,” she added.

Harold was shortsighted, and Jessie was too absorbed in the acting to look off the stage. But Effie had no longer any eyes for the performance, and *her* sight was unfortunately long—unfortunately, for it showed her what turned her former faint doubts into strong certainty. She, who from her earliest childhood had studied every change in Gerard’s changeful face, could not misinterpret the looks which he now cast on Clara. Effie had sometimes met such looks herself—not often, for Gerard’s feeling for her had always had in it more of calm affection than of passion. Lately, his affection had seemed to grow more and more calm; but Effie, in her innocence, had attributed this to the confidence produced by their two years’ engagement. Now that she saw what his eyes *could* express, she felt how little they had ever expressed towards her—how less than ever latterly.

“I shall go round to Gerard, and see what this

means," said Harold, when the curtain fell after the first act. He went, and presently Effie saw Gerard start up, and colour violently. Then she saw Harold speaking gravely to him, and courteously to Miss Monro; and then Gerard disappeared from the opposite box.

"What a stupid blunder!" he said, as he entered behind Jessie's seat. "The boxkeeper must have mistaken our number. It is very vexatious. It would have been much pleasanter to be all together. Will you come to the other side? I do not like to ask Mrs. Welford to move."

"Should we see as well from that side?" asked Jessie.

"Not quite," replied Gerard, who kept his eyes studiously averted from Effie.

"I think we had better stay here, Jessie," Effie said, with an effort, her voice sounding strange to herself. "It will make so much confusion for us to move. We shall meet Clara Monro as we go out. See, the curtain is drawing up! You had better go back, Gerard."

"Had I not better stay here?" asked Gerard, still not looking at her.

"No; it would be rude towards Mrs. Welford," replied Effie, very decidedly.

"But I cannot leave you till Harold comes."

"Oh yes. Go, and send Harold to us. Good-bye."

“Very well,” said Gerard, in a hesitating tone; and he walked off slowly, not having once looked Effie in the face.

Harold took his seat without a word, and never turned his eyes from the stage during the next act. Effie could see that Gerard’s manner was very different from what it had been before he was aware of her presence. He now seemed awkward and embarrassed; and every moment he cast furtive glances towards her side of the house.

On the staircase they all met. There was a good deal of confused talking, and then Effie’s hand was on Gerard’s arm, and he was leading her to the carriage, following Harold and Jessie.

“You had better not leave your friends, Gerard,” Effie said, when they had walked in perfect silence for a few minutes.

“Their carriage cannot come up yet,—I shall be back in time. You will have to walk to Suffolk Street before you will get your fly.”

“Give me to Harold,” implored Effie. “Why should you go all that way with us?”

“Because I like it,” replied Gerard, very gravely. “Are you well wrapped up?” he asked, as they turned into the street.

“Yes, quite,” replied Effie, but her teeth chattered.

“You are cold! Take my coat;” he threw his overcoat across her shoulders, and folded it carefully

round her. Effie could not resist. Nothing more was said till they reached the fly, in which Harold and Jessie were already seated.

“Good-night, Jessie. Good-night, Hay. Good-night, Effie.” Gerard gave a lingering, remorseful kind of pressure to Effie’s hand, and turned away.

“Good-night,” said Harold, very coldly. Jessie only yawned. Effie could hardly keep back a sob.

CHAPTER XII.

"ALTHOUGH I should have liked to see the ladies, I am not sorry to find you alone, Mr. Yonge," said Mrs. Welford, entering Harold's studio the afternoon after the meeting at the Haymarket.

"I don't think my ladies will be very long away. My wife had some visits to pay in the village, and she has taken Effie with her. I hope Miss Monro is very well."

"Quite well, thank you. To tell you the truth, Mr. Yonge, it is about Clara that I wish to speak to you."

Harold's heart sank. He merely bowed.

"I have no doubt you are aware that your brother has been paying great attention to Miss Monro ever since she has been at my house."

"I was aware last evening that he appeared to be paying her great attention," answered Harold, stiffly.

"I am naturally anxious about Clara," continued Mrs. Welford, "as I feel in a manner responsible to

her parents for her safety whilst she is with me. Your brother is rather a dangerous young man, you know, Mr. Yonge."

Harold groaned. Mrs. Welford looked surprised, but went on: "Of course I have no right to inquire whether Mr. Gerard Yonge is in a position to marry—that is the province of Clara's parents—but what I hope you will pardon me for asking is, whether you imagine that your brother has any intention of proposing marriage, or whether, as is so often the case amongst young men, he is merely amusing himself with poor Clara?"

"May I ask in return whether you have any reason to fear that Miss Monroe—in short, that Miss Monroe's feelings are involved?"

"To be frank with you, Mr. Yonge, it was just that fear which drove me here to-day. I have no doubt that Clara is deeply attached to your brother—of course it is understood that this is entirely between ourselves."

"Of course. I cannot interfere in this matter, Mrs. Welford. You had better ask my brother the questions you have asked me. I can only say——"

"I am so glad I did not miss you, Mrs. Welford," cried Jessie, entering the room, followed by Effie and by Gerard.

It was very embarrassing. Harold was no actor, and he *could* not greet his brother with any show of

cordiality, nor could he avoid throwing glances of commiseration on Effie.

Fortunately, Mrs. Welford was a woman of the world, and was always mistress of the occasion. She at once entered into an animated discussion with Jessie on the subject of the previous night's entertainment; and the rest of the party were left almost entirely to their own uneasy reflections. Painful as this position was, they all experienced a dread of what would follow when the visitor rose to leave, having, as the ostensible motive of her visit, invited all the Yonges and Effie to dine at her house on the following Thursday. Gerard was glad to escape his brother's severe looks for a few minutes by going with Mrs. Welford to her carriage; and Effie was about to take advantage of the general move to fly to her own room, when, as the other three were descending the stairs, Harold called her back. He drew her tenderly towards him, and holding her so that he might support her without seeing her face, said, in a hoarse voice, "Effie, Gerard is a villain!"

Effie wrenched herself away, and stood defiantly in the middle of the room. "He is not, Harold! I know what you would say," she added, hastily, as Harold was about to speak. "I know it all. I know what Mrs. Welford came about. I know that he loves Clara Monroe. I have known it ever since—" she paused, thinking what years it seemed—"ever

since last night. Don't come near me, Harold," she cried, as Harold made a movement towards her. "Don't touch me! Don't pity me! And don't—if you have any love for me, Harold, don't say he is a villain. I can bear anything but that. But if you blame him, I—" she paused hearing Jessie's voice upon the stairs. "Let me speak to him, Harold. Don't *you*—oh pray don't!"

"I must, Effie," said Harold.

"Then—oh, be kind to him, Harold! And don't let him go without—let me see him once more." She darted from the room just as Gerard came in.

Gerard had been making up his mind to take the bull by the horns; so he said, boldly, "There is something wrong, Harold."

Harold was standing at the window, with his back to his brother, and did not immediately answer. At last he turned round suddenly, and confronted Gerard. "There is a great deal wrong, and you know it, Gerard."

"I don't know—at least—that is—well, I won't tell a lie—I *do* know that I have been behaving like a fool about Clara Monro, and that Effie has a right to be angry with me. But I do not see that any one else has that right."

"I have, as Effie's brother. Poor child! She used to say she had two brothers. She has but one now, and I have none. He is no brother of mine who

tampers with the affections of one girl when he is engaged to another."

"Harold! it is not so bad as that," pleaded Gerard.

"What is it then? Are you engaged to Effie?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Have you not been tampering with Clara Monro's affections?"

"No—at least—no, I don't think I have."

"There should be no doubt in such cases. Have you won her affections?"

"I—I don't know."

"You do know, Gerard. Do not add lying to treachery."

"Harold!"

"Answer my question."

"I cannot. We have no right to discuss Miss Monro's feelings."

"Miss Monro's friend has asked me the meaning of your behaviour. I might have told her that it was the behaviour of a scoundrel."

"I will not stand that, Harold, even from you."

"You cannot say it is not true."

"It is not true—as you would acknowledge if you would listen to me."

"I will not listen to you. You can say nothing to excuse your conduct. The more you attempt to palliate it, the more evident it will be that you are lost to all sense of honour."

"I will not attempt to palliate it. I own that I have been very wrong. But if Effie will forgive me I do not think you need condemn me."

"Effie will speak for herself. For *myself* I say that I utterly break all the ties between us—from henceforth you will be to me as a stranger. I have loved you far beyond the common love of a brother—but that is over. I hate the cold-blooded villain who thinks nothing of breaking a woman's heart."

"You are too hard upon me, Harold."

"I am just. That I may not be tempted to be otherwise, I desire never to see you again. And I desire that my boys should forget their love for one who has forgotten the honour of a gentleman. You will never again be welcome in my house. You understand me?"

"Yes," said Gerard, almost inaudibly. There was silence for a few minutes, and then Gerard walked towards the door. He was pale, but as calm as Harold.

"You are unmerciful, Harold, and, whatever you may think, unjust. I do not desire ever to enter your house again. But you cannot break the ties between us. You may teach your boys to hate me, but I shall never cease to love them and their father. Now, may I see Effie?"

"You will find her waiting for you. Good-bye."

Thus dismissed, Gerard, after one earnest look at

his brother, left the room. Martha, whom he met in the hall, told him Effie was in the day-nursery, the children being out. Effie had gone straight to the nursery from Harold's studio. Mechanically she had laid aside her bonnet and cloak, and then she had seated herself on one of the children's straight-backed chairs. She sat very still, with her arms folded tightly, as though she were holding herself together. She *was* holding her composure together—not daring to move, or even to think, for fear it should fall to pieces. Thus Gerard found her. As he entered the room Effie tried to force a smile to her lips, but the feeble attempt died away when she saw his ghastly, drawn face. He came up quickly, and took one of her cold hands. It lay like a stone in his. "Harold has nearly broken my heart, Effie. Won't you give me some comfort?" he said.

Effie moved her lips, but no words came.

"He forbids me ever to enter this house again," Gerard continued.

"I am very sorry," said Effie at last. She spoke slowly and distinctly, though in so low a tone that Gerard was forced to lean forward to catch her words. Neither to him nor to herself did the voice sound like her own.

"You do not think so very badly of me, do you, Effie?"

Effie could not get any words out.

"You do not think I am so very much to blame?"

"I do not think you are to blame. You could not help it."

"No. I really could not. I confess, Effie, that I deserve a scolding from you. But I do not think Harold need be so angry with me."

"I shall not scold you," Effie said, so mournfully that Gerard was startled.

"But you are angry with me too, Effie!" he cried.

"No. I am not angry."

"You despise me! You think me a 'cold-blooded villain,' as Harold called me!"

"No, oh, no!" cried Effie, roused into life again by this. "Don't think of anything Harold said. He judges too harshly of such things."

"Yes, does he not? But you understand how it all happened, Effie. You will not let it make any difference between us?"

"Any difference?" repeated Effie, in a puzzled tone.

"You will not cast me off?"

"I will never cast you off. I shall never cease to care for—to care about all that concerns you, more than for anything else in the world."

"But you speak as if we were to be—as if things would be altered between us," said Gerard, becoming alarmed again. "You don't say that you will 'care for me.' You don't surely mean that you will not

care for me any longer—that you will not marry me?” He looked eagerly into Effie’s pale face. She could not answer him at once. She could not look at him.

“I will not have *you* marry *me*,” she said at length, almost in a whisper.

“Why not?” asked Gerard, fiercely.

“You love—Clara Monro.”

“I—I—” Gerard tried in vain to speak coherently, and then got up, and strode hastily up and down the room. After a few turns he grew calmer, and came back to Effie’s side.

“Effie—on my honour, I do not love her as well as I love you.”

“That is not true,” said Effie, not angrily, but very sadly.

“It is. I believe it is.” He was silent for some minutes, and then he said, “I do not understand it. I think she has bewitched me. When I am with her—and particularly when she sings—I forget everything else ; but Effie, I cannot give you up.”

“Let me be your sister again, as in the old——” she could not finish the sentence.

“That was all the mischief. You have been too much like a sister to me, Effie. Clara is so different—she—she—it seemed to me that she——”

“That she felt more than a sister’s affection for you?” asked Effie, rather bitterly.

"Yes. Don't think me vain, Effie. But one can't help seeing that sort of thing."

"No. I believe you are right."

"Do you?" And Gerard, even now, looked gratified.

"Yes. You will have a wife that any man might be proud of."

Gerard coloured violently. "I will have no wife but you, Effie," he said.

"You will never have me for a wife."

"Never?" echoed Gerard, in a sad, reproachful tone. "Are you jealous, Effie?" he added, hastily.

"No. I am not jealous."

"You see it is so different with you. You have always been very kind to me, and very— But somehow—I don't think you have that sort of feeling for me—you care for me just as you do for Harold. I am not complaining, mind. Heaven knows I have nothing to complain of, but very much to be grateful for— But you must feel yourself that your—your—your feeling for me is rather—rather cold."

All who knew Effie knew that her nature was passionate—that under great acquired calm there slept a tornado, which would sometimes burst forth, and with vehemence more deep than loud sweep away all the barriers that had been erected to restrain it. Such a storm came now.

"Cold!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet, and standing before Gerard, with her arms folded again,

her fists clenched, and her eyes flashing. "Cold! From the time I was almost a baby—before I knew what to call my own feelings—I cared for you more than for anything in the world. Your presence was my only happiness—your good my only desire—your love my only ambition. Those feelings have never changed since—excepting that they have grown with my growth. They have been my support, my life, my religion. And you call them cold!"

"Why did you not tell me this before, Effie?" asked Gerard, who was now white and trembling.

"I did not think it necessary," replied Effie, sinking rapidly from her exalted mood, and beginning to feel terribly inclined to cry.

There was a long silence. Gerard seemed completely struck down. He sat quite still, with his eyes fixed on the opposite wall. At last he moved uneasily in his chair, and covering his face with his hand, said in a low, uncertain voice, "I have been a villain. Harold is right."

"No, you have not!" cried Effie; "you must not think so—no one must think so. I could not bear it. I should feel that I had brought it upon you. You could not help fancying that you cared for me—we were thrown so much together—and—and—you pitied me. It is only fortunate that you found out it *was* fancy before it was too late." There was a

shade of bitterness in these last words. Gerard's quick ear caught the tone.

"You do despise me, Effie?"

Effie looked at him long and earnestly. "I cannot," was all she said.

"You love me still, in spite of all! Oh, Effie, you will let things be as they were?"

"How is that possible?"

"It is possible. We could all be happy if you would marry me. If you ever felt for me as you say——"

"What have you to give me in exchange for such feelings?" asked Effie, interrupting him, sternly.

Gerard's reviving spirit sank in a moment. "Very little," he answered, humbly, hanging his head.

"Then do not say again that everything between us is not over for ever," said Effie, decidedly, but no longer sternly.

"Effie, it kills me to hear you speak in that tone," cried Gerard, writhing as though in pain.

"I am sorry. Then let us never speak of all this again. Will you promise?"

"I must do whatever you ask." He buried his face in his hands.

Effie slipped her engagement-ring off her finger. When Gerard at length looked up she held it towards him.

"What is that?" he asked, with a bewildered air.

Effie did not speak, but dropped the ring into the

hand which he had mechanically stretched out for it. He looked at her fixedly, and then down at the trinket lying on his open palm. His face worked with emotion. At last he raised his eyes again, brimming over with tears, and said, "Effie, don't give it back to me. Think of that evening when I gave it to you."

Effie almost jumped from her chair, and the blood rushed into her face. "Are you a man to torture me so?" she cried.

"I beg your pardon! I hardly know what I say; I am so wretched. Must I take it, then?"

"Yes."

Gerard slipped the ring into his waistcoat-pocket, and again buried his face in his hands.

"Another thing I ask is, that no one shall know what has occurred between us," Effie said, after a long silence. "Very few people knew of our—of the relation in which we stood to each other, and no one need know what has happened now."

"They must," answered Gerard; "every one must know that I have been forbidden this house."

"I hope Harold will think better of that."

"He never will. Harold never changes, and his anger against me is fearful. His scorn was worse to bear. Effie! he said he hated the cold-blooded villain who could break a woman's heart! I have not done that? I have not broken your heart?"

"No," said Effie, quietly; "I shall not hurt. I was very happy before we were—before you thought you cared for me; and I shall not be unhappy now that I know it was all a mistake."

"It was not a mistake, Effie."

"Yes, it was. I would much rather think it was a mistake than think that you had been fickle."

"You will think that. Every one will think that."

Effie drew a long breath. Her strength was nearly gone. She felt she must go on speaking, or she should utterly break down.

"I can bear anything, if people will let me alone. If only all this could be forgotten—if everything could be between us as it was before——"

"It cannot be; you all think so badly of me now." He paused, struggling with his emotion. Then he got up; "I must see Harold again."

"Oh, do not! It will be of no use. What more can you say to him? Surely, too much has been said already."

"I must tell him that he is right. What you have said alters everything. I must tell him that I know now I am the villain that he thinks me."

"Do not say that. He must not think that of you."

"He must, Effie, and so must you. It is almost more than I can bear!" he staggered, and leant over a chair for support.

"You will find comfort," said Effie.

"No, I shall not, Effie. Nothing can ever make up for what my own folly has lost me." He turned to leave the room.

"Do be friends with Harold."

"I am friends with him, but I know he will never forgive me. And if he did, it would be no good—I could not come here—I could never hold up my head amongst you again."

"One thing," said Effie, as he was about to leave the room; "we have both got a part to act. You will be at the Welfords' on Thursday?"

"I cannot!" cried Gerard.

"*I* can."

"Very well, I will," said Gerard, setting his teeth. And then he moved away again. When he had gone through the door, he turned, came back quickly towards Effie, and took her hand.

"Not for my own sake, Effie; but for the sake of him who loved us both—forgive me."

"I do forgive you—I do not think I have anything to forgive."

"You are avenged," muttered Gerard, as he dropped her hand, and, giving one great sob, walked slowly from the room.

He went at once to Harold's studio, where he found his brother standing just as he had left him. Harold looked at him coldly, without speaking.

Gerard began, in the sharp, unmodulated tones of great suffering, "I wish to say one word before I relieve you of my presence for ever. I know now that you are right. I *am* a villain. It is all over between Effie and me. She forgives me; but I cannot ask *you* to forgive me. I can never forgive myself. You cannot despise and hate me more than I despise and hate myself."

Before Harold could draw back Gerard had seized his hand, and grasping it tightly, muttered, "God bless you, dear old fellow!" Without looking again at his brother he left the room, and Harold heard the dull, heavy tread go down the stairs, and out of the house.

Effie heard it also. But her work was not done yet. She could not yet allow herself to think. Harold was still standing when she entered his room. "Did you speak kindly to him, Harold?"

"I did not speak to him at all, darling," he answered, tenderly.

"Not one word?" cried Effie.

"No. What could I say? I am glad that he acknowledges his sin."

"Oh, Harold! You have no right to be so hard upon him."

"I cannot be a hypocrite, Effie."

"He is not to blame, Harold. He liked me only as a sister; but he fancied it was something more,

and—I—I was cold; and then he was thrown with Clara, and she is so gloriously beautiful, and—Harold! how could he help seeing that she loves him? And so—what could he do? What could any one expect of him?”

“I expected of him to behave like a man of honour. But I cannot speak of this to you, my poor darling!”

“Let us never speak of it again, Harold. But don’t call me ‘poor;’ I shall do very well. I can bear it. You must help me, will you?”

“With my life, Effie.”

“Never pity me. Never blame him. And don’t think me mad, whatever I may do. Let me alone. Don’t try ever to help or comfort me. Will you promise this?”

“Yes. It will be a hard promise to keep.”

“You will keep it. And you will make Jessie do the same.”

“I will do what I can.”

“I shall go to the Welfords’ on Thursday, Harold.”

“My darling!”

“I hope you will go also. Gerard will be there—he has promised me.”

“I cannot meet him, Effie. It will be better not. Anything else I will do, but that I cannot.”

“You will tell Jessie that I am going, then?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you.”

And then Effie walked up to her own room. Still

not to think. From the top shelf of a closet she took down a small, old, papered deal box; out of one of her drawers she took a key. Then she carried the box up to the nursery, locked the door, sat down near the fire, and lifting the lid, poured out the contents on the floor beside her. A strange medley! There were all Gerard's letters, tied up in various packets, from the child's scrawl to his "dear efe," to the last week's note to "My own little woman," from her "ever-loving Gay." There were scraps of drawing, from rough childish attempts, to finished artistic sketches. There were bits of twine, balls, tops, lollypops—the offerings of the baby lover; and there were trifling articles of jewellery, gloves, handkerchiefs, ribbons,—the presents of the betrothed husband. Then there were other secret relics—pencils he had drawn with, knives he had worn out, neckties he had thrown away. For eight years everything that Gerard's hand had touched or his eyes rested upon—if it were attainable, and not too large—had been treasured in this box. One by one, Effie looked at every article in her hoard, recalling when and why it had been laid by. When only the letters remained, she separated the trinkets from the other things, and wrapped them up in paper. The rest she gathered in her hands, and threw on to the fire, watching the flame till all was consumed. After that, she returned to the letters, read through each one, and then put

it on the fire. When the last was burnt, she took up the empty box and the paper packet, and left the room with them. At the door she met the children, returning from spending the day at Mrs. Butterfield's.

"Here, Davie," said Effie. "Here is a nice box for your playthings."

The little fellow ran gleefully into the nursery with his acquisition. Effie thought of the day when she had hunted out the old box in the lumber-room at Pixycombe, and had appropriated it for her stores. She went on to her own room, hastily put on her bonnet and cloak, and went out into the fast-gathering darkness.

She walked rapidly up the lane beside the house, and crossed the stile into the Steadham fields. As she walked along the margin of one pond, looking earnestly into its depths, and then started off again, and almost ran over the brow of the hill to the margin of another pond, any looker-on might naturally have suspected her of suicidal intentions. But there was no looker-on, and Effie was not bent on self-destruction—though she was bent upon the destruction of every relic of her former self. She could never tell why the first pond did not suit her purpose—perhaps it was that she wanted to put off the moment of parting with her treasures. However that may have been, when she reached the second

pond she no longer delayed, but threw the packet with all her force into the water. There was a little splash, and then she turned and ran home, faster than she had ever run before. In the hall she met Jessie.

"I am so glad you have come in," Jessie exclaimed. "I could not think what kept you out so late. And you have had nothing to eat since breakfast."

"I suppose it is nearly dinner-time now?"

"Yes, dear," said Jessie, in a tone of such unwonted tenderness that Effie winced. She must show Jessie and Harold that she need not be treated as an object of pity.

"I must be quick," she cried, and bounded gaily upstairs.

She *was* quick, appearing, in a few minutes, in her most becoming costume, and with her most lively air. She kept up her part bravely all the evening—failing only by overdoing it. Jessie, whose idea of grief consisted in sobs and wailing, and a withdrawal from the ordinary affairs of life, was completely bewildered. Harold, who noticed what Jessie did not—the food sent away untasted, and the frequent nervous start—trembled for the energies which were being so hardly taxed. He was very glad when bed-time came—a time which Effie had tried to delay by every means in her power. When she shut her bedroom door she felt that the dreaded moment of *thinking* had

now come. No, she could put it off a little longer. Vigorously she brushed her hair, put her drawers in order, arranged her clothes for the next day. But at last she could find no more to do, and she was lying still, in the dark. And so she lay till morning—reviewing, over and over again, the events of the day and of the last few weeks. Again she went through the parting scene with Gerard; saw his miserable, remorseful face; heard his low, heartbroken tones. Again the strange sound of her own voice rang in her ears, and her words sounded hard and bitter. She remembered with surprise and regret how calmly and coldly she had spoken, and how unfriendly it must have seemed to him that she had not once called him by his name. In the stillness of the night she said that dear name to herself again and again, as though to make amends for having shunned the use of it before. Then there came to her mind, unbidden, scenes of her childhood, in which Gerard had played the chief part—scenes of her opening womanhood, in which some careless word of his had filled her heart with joy—scenes of the last two years in which he had claimed, and she had given him, a proud proprietorship in all belonging to her. She rose the next morning wan and weary, but with unabated spirit, fighting off the slightest attempt at consolation, and tacitly demanding to be looked upon as perfectly happy.

So the days went on till Thursday came. Harold had hoped that Effie would give in before that ; but Effie had no thought of giving in. She had prepared her dress for that occasion with unusual care, and for the first time in her life she begged for Hannah's assistance at her toilette. Jessie gave up her maid with perfect good-nature, and only laughed at Harold's awkwardness in supplying her place. Effie's face was quite pale and her hand burning when Harold put her into the carriage ; but before they reached Mr. Welford's house in Harley Street she had talked a bright flush into her cheeks. The flush became brighter still as, in going upstairs, the thought came into her mind how she could bear it if Clara had a very triumphant air, and Gerard were evidently her acknowledged lover.

Clara looked anything but triumphant, however. She was pale and thoughtful — giving a languid attention to the conversation of a fair young man who bent over her. She became a little more animated as she greeted Effie, and reintroduced to her a bright, handsome young fellow, who then came up, as "my brother Harry." Gerard was not in the room, and Effie soon began partly to fear, and partly to hope, that he had broken his promise to her. When a stout "Mr. Swann" had made his entrance with ostentatious hurry, Mr. Welford observed, "My dear, I think we must not wait any longer for Yonge

—most likely some mistake ;” and the order to “serve up” was given. With the announcement of the dinner came Gerard, making humble apologies for his unpunctuality, but not at all with his usual gay volubility. Effie saw at once that he looked pale and grave. Without any more delay, the master of the house dispossessed the fair man—Mr. Lamb—and Gerard took his place—producing an immediate change in Clara’s countenance. Poor Mr. Lamb was degraded to the younger sister, Kate. Harry offered his arm to Effie, and the party proceeded to the dining-room.

At table Effie was placed exactly opposite Clara, who had Gerard on her right hand. The painful nature of her position developed a hitherto untried power. She flirted with Harry Monro till he began rapidly to follow in his brother George’s footsteps ; and she drew out Mr. Lamb with such success that he ceased to regret the beauty who had been so ruthlessly snatched from him. Gerard was astounded. He could hardly recognise the quiet, shy girl—with talents that were never done justice to by her words or her manner—in this animated, bright-eyed little woman, who never ceased talking and laughing, and who seemed bent upon winning the hearts of the two men beside her. Effie’s end of the table monopolised the conversation. Mr. Swann was quite engrossed with the entertainment of his hostess, the

duties of carving, and the necessity of providing for his own support. Clara, therefore, was free to give her whole attention to Gerard; but Gerard did not seem disposed to claim any attention from her. Poor Kate, also, who sat on Gerard's other side, made vain demands upon him, whom she had usually found so ready to laugh and talk with her. The unfortunate young man seemed completely crushed by the miserable awkwardness of his position. Effie saw it all, and her heart ached for him. Once she caught his eye—fixed on her with a sad, almost gloomy expression—and then she smiled and bowed, in friendly recognition. He did not attempt to smile in return, but inclined his head gravely, and then bent his face lower and lower, until Effie feared that he was about to bury it in his plate. She felt almost angry with him for his childish want of self-command.

That dinner seemed drawn out far beyond the usual weary length of dinners; but at last Mrs. Welford looked at Jessie and smiled, and Jessie bowed and *beamed*, and the “order of release” had come. There was half an hour of comparative peace in talking to Kate and the young Welfords, and then the gentlemen came. Gerard was the last, and before he appeared Harry had found out Effie amongst her young companions, and Mr. Lamb had fastened upon Clara. Gerard looked at the various groups, but, instead of joining either, took a book of

engravings from the table, and pretended to be absorbed in its contents. Clara sang, but still he did not move, nor even appear to listen. Then Harry sang, Kate playing the accompaniment, and the young Welfords having gone to bed, Effie was left alone. She was just making up her mind to move to Mrs. Welford's side, when Gerard laid down his book and came towards her.

"I heard you say Harold was not well," he said, abruptly, standing by her side. "He is not really unwell, is he?"

"No—only he—he has been a good deal worried—at least——" she wished that word "worried" had not slipped out.

"I understand," said Gerard, sadly.

Neither spoke again, but he did not move away. When Harry had finished his song he returned to his seat by Effie, and then he and Gerard entered into conversation about old Eton friends and pranks in Norfolk.

At last Jessie moved to leave. Mr. Welford escorted her to the carriage, and Effie followed with Harry. They had taken leave of Gerard in the drawing-room with the others, but he came down the stairs after them. As Harry put on Effie's cloak she could see Gerard's tall form in the background. When the carriage drove off, he was on the doorsteps, and when Mr. Welford and Harry had made their

parting salutation, a hoarse voice, which Effie recognised, though Jessie did not, cried out, "Good-night."

It was over ; and now there was nothing but her pride to keep Effie from utterly breaking down.

CHAPTER XIII.

PRIDE will serve tolerably well for a support so long as it is bolstered up by the excitement of feeling which always follows any severe shock, and which, for a time, prevents the sufferer from realising the full force of the blow which has been received. This Effie experienced. But when the excitement had passed away, her sustaining pride was gone too. She then felt the need of some external excitement. Had she been of a frivolous nature, she would have sought the distraction of so-called "gaiety," — but such distraction had no charms for her. She required more of a mental stimulus, and this she sought in hard study. Greek with Mrs. Mortlake—German with Miss Sarah Butterfield—Perspective lessons with Harold. These were the employments with which she endeavoured so to fill up her time that no room might be left for thought. Thus she passed her days, and thus she laboured on—long after others were asleep—striving to tire herself out that she

might escape those nights of miserable wakefulness, and more miserable dreams, which were the worst part of her trouble.

But this ill-advised mode of meeting sorrow could not be persisted in for long. One day little Davie ran away from his lessons, in open-eyed amazement, to tell his papa that Auntie was crying.

Harold followed the child back, and found Effie sobbing convulsively.

"How stupid I am!" she gasped out. "Davie's sum puzzled me, and so I—I began to cry, like a great baby. You should not—have to—old of me—Da—vie."

Harold sat down beside her, and took her hand tenderly.

"You have overworked yourself, darling," he said.

"I—I don't think I am very well," returned Effie. "My head aches. Per—haps I had better lie down a little."

She got up and left the room; and Harold took the opportunity of inculcating on his little son extreme tenderness to "poor Auntie."

His exertions in Effie's favour did not stop here. He immediately walked up the hill to Mr. Rogers'; and that evening Effie was surprised by a visit from the doctor, who pronounced that she was in a very critical state; that the nerves had evidently received some severe *strain*; and that she must have imme-

diate and complete change of scene. Again Harold took his hat, and walked up the hill, but this time only as far as Mr. Samuel Butterfield's. Mr. and Mrs. Butterfield, sitting over their dessert, were almost as much surprised to see their usually unsociable neighbour enter as Jessie had been to see her husband go out without saying where he was going.

"And when do you start for Switzerland?" asked Harold, coming to the object of his visit, after a few preliminary civilities.

"Next Tuesday, if Samuel can get away then," returned his hostess.

"You do not intend to take any of the young people with you, I suppose?"

"Oh dear no. Samuel cannot endure being troubled with the children, and I have enough to do to look after him. Emily Butterfield is going with us. And I wish we could find some young man to be a beau for her. You don't know any one, do you, Mr. Yonge? Your brother is not thinking of taking a holiday, I suppose? I believe he is away somewhere now, is he not? I have not seen him with you lately."

"No, he is not away," replied Harold, absently. "Would a lady companion be of any use to Miss Butterfield?"

"Oh yes, if you know of any nice girl who would like to go with us. We should be very glad of

another young lady, should we not, Samuel? Emily is rather dull company."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Butterfield, I came to ask you a great favour. My sister Effie is not well—she has been overworking herself with all sorts of abstruse studies, and Rogers says she wants a complete change."

"And you will let her go with us," cried Mrs. Butterfield. "Nothing could be pleasanter! We shall be delighted to have Miss Garnock, shall we not, Samuel? It will be such a nice thing for Emily. I always think it is a great drawback to the pleasure of travelling for a girl, the having to sleep alone at inns—I am sure I should not like it at all. I dare say Miss Garnock won't mind sleeping with Emily. In fact, I have no doubt she would rather—for I suppose she is as little used to travelling as Emily is."

"She has never travelled at all. So everything will be quite new to her—and that is just what she wants."

"I am so sorry to hear she is not well. I have thought her looking ill for some weeks. No little heart affair, eh, Mr. Yonge? Young ladies will fall into such troubles sometimes."

"Oh, Effie is too busy for anything of that sort," said Harold, turning very red, for he was little used to indulge in untruths.

"We will take every possible care of her," continued Mrs. Butterfield, seeing at once from Harold's manner that her surmise was right. "We shall soon effect a cure. That was just my case when I first met Samuel; and we were married in less than six months. I shall be delighted with the charge, Mr. Yonge."

So it was settled that Effie should go to Switzerland with the Butterfields. She made no opposition to the plan, being most anxious to shake off an illness for which Gerard was certain to be blamed. Harold made all the necessary arrangements for her journey, and Hannah packed up her clothes; and then, at five o'clock one bright June morning, she walked wearily down the garden, leaning on Harold's arm, and took the vacant seat in the Butterfields' carriage. As they drove off, Effie could hardly have told what their destination was, and she did not care to know. Mrs. Butterfield talked for all the party. Mr. Butterfield was taciturn, as usual, and his sister was sleepy. In the narrow part of Holborn the carriage was stopped by some heavy waggons; and as Effie looked listlessly from the window her eyes fell on Gerard, standing on the pavement, just parting from another young man. As his friend walked off, he raised his head and looked straight at Effie, whose eyes were still fixed upon him. He started forward, but suddenly checked himself, and stood motionless, looking very pale in

the morning light. Effie seemed fascinated — she could neither turn away her face, nor make any sign of recognition. When the carriage at last moved on, Gerard was still standing in the same spot.

The impression of him remained on Effie's mind, older, thinner, graver, and more careworn than he used to look, and with a disorderly, rakish air, very new in him—which it was to be hoped might have been caused by the unsuitableness of his evening dress to the daylight hours.

Effie's state of mind after this meeting was very peculiar. Ever since she parted from Gerard she had been dreading such a meeting; and yet now she experienced nothing but a kind of dull curiosity as to his feelings. It seemed as though her mind had become incapable of emotions. And so it continued throughout the journey. She had childish sensations of amusement and pleasure at all the novel sights and sounds of a foreign land—but that was all—nothing had power to rouse her mind, or to make her heart beat faster.

A week after leaving home, the party was comfortably established in the Schweizerhof at Lucerne, which was to be their head-quarters for some time. The second day after their arrival, Mr. Butterfield, who had strolled out after breakfast, returned to say that he was told it would be a beautiful day for the ascent of the Rigi, and that he had been persuaded

to engage horses. Mrs. Butterfield declined attempting the expedition, but the two girls were quite ready ; and they were soon steaming along the lake, with a cold wind blowing in their faces, and heavy clouds closing them in on every side.

“These people are all swindlers, I believe,” said Mr. Butterfield, as he gloomily paced the deck, wrapped in all the overcoats he could muster. “The idea of calling this a beautiful day ! However, I am not to pay for the horses unless it is fine. You understand that ?” turning to the proprietor of the horses, who bowed and grinned, in utter ignorance of what was said.

“Vous comprendre je ne payer pour les chevaux, si vous ne—ne—— Tell him, Emily, that I will not pay for the horses if it is not fine.”

“Nous ne voulons pas payer les chevaux s’il ne sera pas beau——”

“S’il ne fera pas beau temps ! Très bien, madame — ganz wohl — ver goot. You not pay when it makes bad time— Das versteht sich—dat untershtant itself.”

Mr. Butterfield received some satisfaction from this medley of language ; and when they reached the landing-place, where the ascent was to commence, he quietly submitted to disembark, and to mount on horseback, in spite of the threatening clouds. In half an hour they were in these clouds, and in

another half-hour they emerged into the most lovely summer's day, with the clouds lying like a snowdrift below them. Even Mr. Butterfield broke out into enthusiasm, and Effie had a sensation as though the weight which had lain so long upon her heart and her brain were being lifted from them. She could not speak, but when they reached the halting-place at the summit she wandered away from the others, and seated herself in a solitary nook, where she could gaze undisturbed on the wonderful sight. As she feasted her eyes on the line of pure glistening summits which rose so majestically out of the soft white bed below, the idea of Eternity seemed for the first time to enter into her mind, and all earthly cares and griefs melted away before it, as the patches of snow at her feet were melting in the mid-day sun. She thought nothing could ever again disturb the deep peace which had fallen upon her; but the sound of footsteps made her anticipate with sudden irritation Mr. Butterfield's cold *patronage* of Nature, and Emily's commonplace rhapsodies. The footsteps approached, and suddenly a young man appeared, climbing the hill just beneath where Effie sat. At the first glance she recognized George Monro. He recognized her also, and sprang to her side, with the joyful exclamation, "Effie!" It was the first time he had ever called her by her Christian name, but it sounded very natural and home-like, and his evident

delight at seeing her was a welcome flattery to her so lately wounded self-love.

“I am so very glad to see you, Mr. Monro,” she said, warmly ; and George looked intensely gratified.

“Are Mr. and Mrs. Yonge here ?” he asked. “And—and—Gerard ?” he added, hastily, punishing himself for a momentary forgetfulness of Gerard’s existence.

“No ; I am travelling with Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Butterfield. You know them, I think ?”

“Slightly. How little I thought, as I toiled up that hill, what a pleasure awaited me at the top !”

“If it is the first time you have been up, you could hardly have known the pleasure in store for you in this magnificent view. At least I could never have imagined anything so beautiful—but you have seen so much, and these are my first snow mountains.”

“It is wonderful,” said George ; “but at present I have no eyes even for the Alps.”

He certainly had no eyes for anything but Effie. Two months ago she would have been embarrassed by his earnest gaze, but now she was only excited, and began to talk fluently of all they had seen and done since they left England. When she and George had joined the Butterfields, and they were all descending the mountain, she could hardly believe that she was the same person who had ascended into the clouds three hours before. It seemed as though

in mounting to the Rigi Kulm she had got above all the mists which had so long darkened her mind, just as she had got above the actual mists which lay near the base of the mountain. Passing again through these clouds, Effie half dreaded the return of her mental clouds ; but she found that in George's earnest tenderness she had brought down the sunshine with her.

"Well, Samuel, I hope it is all right," said Mrs. Butterfield to her husband, in their bedroom that night ; "but we have certainly run against Effie's swain. Did you ever see a girl so changed ? Why, she went away this morning pale and dull, and this evening she is as rosy and almost as handsome as her sister, and so witty and full of talk."

Effie, in her room, was hardly less struck with the change in herself. Instead of the listless apathy, or the studied avoidance of thought, with which she usually began and ended the day, she was now dwelling on scenes which George had described, or working out ideas which he had suggested.

When this had continued for some days she began to ask herself, was it possible that she could be faithless to the love of her whole life ? She might have found an answer to the question in the fact that what most impelled her to this unusual animation was the idea, "What will he think of Gerard if I let him suspect that I am unhappy ?"

At first George, for his own safety, asked frequent questions about Gerard—questions which implied, though they did not actually express, his knowledge of Effie's engagement. Effie parried these painful thrusts for some time; but at last she summoned courage, and said, "Mr. Monroe, I know that Gerard told you that we—how we stood towards each other—that is not the case now. We found it better—we thought—that is, we found we were not suited to each other."

She was sitting opposite to George in a little boat when she said this. He was rowing her to catch the steamboat, for a distance which the others preferred to walk. He had been resting on his oars, cooling his hot face, but her words made his face turn from red to ghastly pale. He fixed his eyes on her for a few minutes, and then bowed his head between his knees. When he raised it again his eyes were glowing with ill-concealed rapture.

"God forgive me!" he murmured. Then to Effie, "Is Gerard very unhappy?"

Poor Effie! "No," she stammered. "Oh no; I think not. We were—it was—our engagement was broken off—because we thought he would—that we should be—happier—apart."

George asked no more questions. But the glow died out of his eyes. There was that in Effie's face which told him that there was no hope for *him* in the

rupture with Gerard. From that moment he had the clue to Effie's high spirits; and whilst every lively sally of hers touched him to the heart, he did all in his power to draw out her newly-awakened talents, and to supply food for her now voracious mind. George Monro had that rare quality, an almost intuitive knowledge of character; and the little light he had gained sufficed to show him that what the Butterfields mistook for feeling in Effie was nothing but mental excitement, and that this excitement was caused by her *feelings* having sustained a paralysing shock. Had George been less acute, Effie would have had much to answer for. As it was, she was laying herself justly open to the charge of flirting. That ugly word never crossed her mind; but had she formerly seen any other girl acting as she was acting now, she would undoubtedly have applied it to her. But in the uprooting of her own affections all the natural girlish ideas of love and flirting had gone too. These words were henceforth to have no place in her vocabulary. There was an indescribable charm in the reawakening of her mind after its protracted sleep; and in the first flush of delight at finding any pleasure, when she had only looked for a life of dull endurance, she began to think that intellectual pleasures were, after all, the only pleasures worth living for. So George's society became her all in all, because his society kept her

mind in full work ; and she never feared to show her enjoyment of his conversation, because she could not conceive the possibility of any tender feeling towards himself.

If she had ever doubted her own constancy, she must have been undeceived one morning, when, as she passed through the hall to the *salle-à-manger*, a waiter placed in her hand a letter addressed in the well-known characters which she had never seen without emotion. “Voici, Mademoiselle, ’ere is une lettre for the Monsieur,” said the man. It was for George, and Effie had to give it to him with what composure she could muster, before she took the seat left for her by his side. George could not summon courage to open this letter in this position, so he put it in his pocket to read under more favourable circumstances. Gerard wrote :

“Berners Street, July 12th.

“MY DEAR GEORGE,

“I was very glad to have news of you at last, though some things in your letter made it a bitter pill to swallow. What a villain I felt when I read your account of meeting Effie, and your kind thought that I should like to hear all about her ! Well—so far you were right. I *do* like to hear all about her, and you are the only person from whom I have a chance of hearing anything, now. What will you

think of me when I tell you that all is over between us, and that it is my fault that it is over? I know that if you should hear anything of this from Effie, you will not hear the truth—which she is much too generous to tell. She has behaved nobly throughout. Harold would tell you—and I tell you myself—that I have behaved like a scoundrel. Harold disowns me for his brother, and I am never to see him, or his wife, or Effie again. I must tell you the whole truth, which is, that I made a fool of myself about your sister when she was staying with the Welfords, and Harold found it out, and he and Effie cast me off. Effie did it as kindly as possible, but Harold's scorn was so terrible that I still shudder when I think of it. I suppose it is not more than all good men would feel. My only excuse is in Clara's magnificent beauty, and irresistible charm of manner. However, that is no excuse for broken faith. I am inexcusable, I know, and I quite expect you to tell me so; but whatever hard words you may write to me in answer to this, I shall remain ever

“Yours affectionately,

“G. A. YONGE.”

George was very glad that he had not read this letter before Effie. It was a great blow to him. He had suspected that Gerard had in some measure proved unworthy of Effie, but to learn that his sister

had been, however innocently, the cause of that unworthiness was a most painful surprise. Clara had frequently mentioned Gerard in her letters to her brother ; but George, knowing Gerard to be engaged, never imagined that his sister had not the same knowledge. He now referred to these letters, and he found, now his eyes were opened, that there was much in them to awaken suspicion, both as to Gerard's conduct towards Clara, and to Clara's feelings towards Gerard.

When George appeared at luncheon, after a morning spent in wandering about, vainly seeking to calm his agitated feelings, Effie read at once in his face that Gerard's letter had contained something more than friendly gossip ; and she immediately concluded that it was a declaration of his love for Clara. That afternoon she contrived to separate herself, with George, from the rest of the party, in the hope that he might tell her what he had heard. But George could not trust himself to speak on this subject, nor could he force himself to speak much on any other. Effie felt angry with him for not telling her what she dreaded to know, but dreaded still more to be spared the knowledge of. When their walk together was nearly over, and nothing had been said, she could bear the suspense no longer, but asked, desperately, " Did Gerard tell you any news ? I saw you had a letter from him this morning."

“No—no news.” There was a pause. Then an irresistible impulse came over George. The love and indignation which had been smouldering all the morning burst into a sudden flame. He caught Effie’s hand, and in a deep, passionate tone, exclaimed, “Yes, Effie, he *did* tell me news—news that I would not have believed from any one but himself—that he is not worthy of friendship or esteem.”

Poor George! That one outburst had undone the work of weeks—even of years.

“And what right have you to believe even himself in this matter?” cried Effie, vehemently.

“What right?” repeated George, astounded.

“Yes, what right? What right has any one to say he is not worthy of esteem and of love? Mr. Monro, how dare you call yourself his friend, and speak in that way? A friend is a friend for ever, and does not change for every little error or weakness. When a man has committed a fault he has all the more need of a true friend to comfort him. Gerard’s was not a fault—only a mistake; but if every one is so hard upon him they will drive him to something worse. No true friend would do that. If you are hard upon him now, your friendship was never worth the name. I should scorn such friendship. I will be his friend always—his friends shall be my friends, and his enemies my enemies.” After this speech Effie walked rapidly into the hotel, which they had just

reached, and flew to her own room, where she sank sobbing on the bed. When she saw George again she said, humbly, "Mr. Monro, I am afraid I was very rude and violent just now. Forgive me. But," she added, "I mean what I said."

She lay awake all that night, pleading Gerard's cause before the whole world, and vowing again and again that the more he was disgraced with others, the more she would exalt him, even if she should never see him again.

So George's words had had the double effect of upsetting his own growing power with Effie, and of setting Gerard more firmly on his throne.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALL George's pleasure at Lucerne was now at an end. Effie no longer seemed to enjoy his society. Her manner towards him was constrained, and all her animation was gone. He was uneasy also about his sister, and puzzled how to act with regard to Gerard. With Effie's words, "*His enemies are my enemies,*" ringing in his ears, he could not answer Gerard's letter as his indignation prompted him ; but it was impossible for him to write in a friendly tone, feeling as he did. Gerard's success with Effie had never damped George's love for him, but now that love seemed turned to hatred. The idea of his sister marrying his former friend was utterly repugnant to him ; and his fears on this head grew so importunate that he determined to go at once to England. Not a word more was said about Gerard ; but Effie felt sure that this sudden return to England had some reference to him and Clara.

The Monros were staying at Richmond ; but

George on his arrival in London drove at once to Berners Street. Gerard was in his studio.

“George! Old boy, how glad I am—” he stopped, and his face fell, as George looked gravely at him. “Ah! You are against me, too. I thought it would be so. But shake hands, at any rate,” he added, after a pause. “We have not met for such a long time.” They shook hands warmly, and then Gerard went on, “Now, tell me where you have sprung from.”

“From the London Bridge Station just now, and before that, from Paris.”

“Then you are ready for food — what will you have?”

“Nothing here.”

“That means that you will not be *my* guest,” said Gerard, reproachfully.

“It means that I had luncheon at Folkestone, and hope to dine at Richmond.”

“Have you come home for good?”

“I don’t know—I am not sure,” answered George, abstractedly. “Are you ever going to sit down, Gerard?” he asked after a pause, during which Gerard had been nervously fidgeting about.

Gerard sat down without speaking, and waited with a most uneasy air for George’s next words.

George continued. “I do not wish to interfere in your private affairs, or to enter upon anything that is

past. But I have come now from Switzerland to know what course you are pursuing, or intend to pursue, towards Clara."

Gerard remained silent for some time, with his eyes fixed on a pencil with which he was playing. At last he looked George boldly in the face: "I intend to marry her, if she will have me."

"You have not yet asked her, then?"

"No."

"Does she know of your former engagement?"

Gerard cast his eyes down again, and said, falteringly, "I don't know."

"You would tell her, I presume, before engaging yourself to her?"

"Yes, I should," cried Gerard, with renewed confidence. "I see you think me a villainous fellow, George; but I am not so bad as all that. When I ask Clara to be my wife I shall tell her how much she will have to overlook."

"And you think she *will* overlook it?"

Gerard jumped up, and walked across the room. "You think not?" he asked, returning, and standing in front of George.

"I could not. I could not love any man or woman who had forfeited my respect. And I believe that Clara and I are very much alike."

"Well, then, that will be the last drop," said Gerard, bitterly. "And then there will be nothing

left for me but to hang or drown myself." After a long silence, he went on, in a low, sad voice, "I must try, at any rate; it is my only hope. I will tell you frankly, George, when first Effie cast me off I had no thought of turning to Clara. But since that I have been so miserable — have felt such an utter Pariah—that I was driven to look for comfort somewhere; and it is a comfort to be with any one who does not tell me that I have 'forfeited her respect,' or call me by such pleasant names as 'cold-blooded villain,' and 'scoundrel.' "

"I should not think there could be much comfort in 'respect' which is founded on ignorance," remarked George, coldly.

"You are bitterly severe, George," said Gerard, flushing up, and then growing paler than before.

George grew agitated now. He also got up, and began to pace the room.

"Gerard," he said, earnestly, stopping after two or three turns, and standing by the table, where the other was now sitting—"when we first became friends at Eton, and had, by mutual consent, cast off the school-boy shyness of talking of home, you used to tell me of your adopted father and sisters. You taught me to love the reverend old man, and, later, you taught me to love his youngest daughter. When I became personally acquainted with Effie Garnock that love was changed from a boyish fancy into a reality, to last my lifetime.

I never feared that our interests would clash, for you had always told me that you loved Effie only as a sister. Even when I learnt from your own lips that you were engaged to her, I did not feel that our friendship was necessarily at an end. For nearly two years I have stayed away from all that I care for, tutoring myself to meet Effie as your wife—to love *you* enough, and not to love *her* too much. I thought I had succeeded in this; and was on my way home, prepared if necessary to be ‘best man’ at your wedding, when I met Miss Garnock on the Righi. I had not been with her half an hour before I saw that something had changed her. Not that she was dull or melancholy,” he cried, with sudden fierceness—“on the contrary, she was more animated, and seemed happier than I had ever seen her. She told me that all was over between you—but your own letter first told me *how* it was over. What should *you* feel towards a man who stole from you the thing you valued most in the world, and then threw it aside with contempt?”

“Contempt!” echoed Gerard. “I! Contempt towards Effie!”

“It appears like it,” said George, coldly. “I ask again, what should you feel?”

“Hatred, I suppose—as you do,” replied Gerard. “You had better say it out frankly, as Harold did.”

There was a long silence, and then Gerard said, bitterly, “And you think Clara will hate me also?”

“I hope she may not love you,” answered George, with terrible directness. “I will tell you frankly, Gerard, few things would be a greater grief to me than for Clara to marry you.”

“If Clara should happen to be more merciful to me than you are, I shall have to cause you that grief.”

“And you have reason to think Clara will be more merciful?”

“No—no—I don’t know,” said Gerard, doubtfully. “I never knew I was such a bad fellow as you and Harold think me; and perhaps I am also a coxcomb, without knowing it.”

There was a long silence, during which Gerard leant his head upon his hand, and fixed his eyes on the floor. He looked up at last, and said, “I cannot give up Clara to please you, George. You do not know how hard it is to be cast off by all the people one cares for. I am like a drowning wretch clinging to a spar, and Clara is the spar. If you take her from me I must sink.”

“I cannot take her from you, if it is her own will to hold to you.”

“But you will try to influence her will?”

“I will not mention you to her, if you will promise to tell her yourself of your engagement to—to Miss Garnock.”

“Very well,” said Gerard, in a low tone, after another long pause.

“Then that is all; and it is time for me to be off. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye. I shall come to Richmond to-morrow, and speak to Clara.”

“Would it not be pleasanter to write?”

“No. Clara would consult you in that case, and you have declared yourself my enemy.”

“An enemy to your errors—a friend to yourself.”

“Save me from such friends!” cried Gerard, half in joke, and half in earnest, as he shook George’s hand.

Gerard had had every encouragement to believe that he was sure to be accepted if he should propose to Clara; nevertheless he went to Richmond with anything but the feelings or the manner of a confident lover. George was alone in the drawing-room, writing letters. “You will find Clara in the garden,” he said, shortly, after the first cool greetings were over. “I suppose what you have to do had better be done at once. My father and mother are out, and you will not be disturbed by any of the children. Clara has promised to go for a row with Ned and me at five o’clock. She has gone to the stables to see Charlie start for a ride. If Ned is with her, you can tell him it is time to go for the boat.”

Thus dismissed, Gerard went in search of Clara. He found her, as George had said, in the stable-yard with Ned, playing with two young dogs. It was not

necessary to send Ned away, for he soon got tired of staying, when he found that Clara had lost all interest in the gambols of the puppies, and had no attention to spare for them, or for him.

"Shall we go in?" asked Clara, when Ned had walked away. "George is at home, though Papa and Mamma are out."

"I have seen George," said Gerard, hurriedly. "I want to speak to you alone, Clara. Where can we go?"

His voice was very unsteady, and everything danced before his eyes; but his agitation was nothing to that of Clara, who could hardly speak.

"Anywhere," she murmured, almost inaudibly.

So Gerard, hardly knowing what he did, sat down on an empty trough in the yard, and Clara stood trembling and blushing in front of him. Her looks told so plainly what reception his suit would meet with, that it was very hard to have to preface it with anything which might alter those looks; and Gerard, coward as he was, put off the bitter task as long as possible.

"I think you must know what I am going to say, Clara—and I think you would not let me say it if it were very presumptuous—" He hesitated. Clara raised her glowing eyes for a moment, and *looked* that it was not presumptuous. There shot through Gerard's mind, almost simultaneously with the thrill caused by the glance of those glorious eyes, a regretful thought or

how coyly Effie had first responded to his wooing. He had a dissatisfied feeling that Clara was rather *too* easily won.

“You do know that I love you, Clara. Will you not let me know that it is not in vain?”

“I think you *do* know that, Gerard,” Clara almost whispered, with another eloquent look.

“Do I?” cried Gerard, rapturously. “May I know that you—that I am anything to you?”

Clara kept her eyes veiled by their long lashes, and said nothing.

“May I know that you care for me, Clara?”

Still she only blushed. But the blush said as much as the eyes had said before.

“May I know that you love me, Clara?” Gerard repeated, still more eagerly.

Clara raised her head, and her eyes and her moving lips said, “Yes,” but her voice said nothing. It was enough for Gerard, however.

“Yes!” he cried. “You said ‘yes!’ You love me, Clara!”

The eyes and the lips did their work again, and then Gerard remembered *his* work.

“God bless you for your love, Clara! I wish I were worthy of it!”

That was too vague. Clara evidently only regarded it as becoming modesty in a lover. He had to try again.

"I am not worthy of the great treasure of your love, Clara."

"Are you not?" she said, archly.

This was still worse. Should he say no more, and defy George? The temptation was very great.

"I am serious, Clara," he said, his better self triumphing, after a short struggle. "This is no mock modesty. It is sober earnest. I am *not* worthy of you, or of any woman. I am fickle, and false, and dishonourable. My own brother calls me a 'cold-blooded villain,' and George says I have forfeited his respect. Can you love me in spite of all this, Clara?"

"Of all what?" asked Clara, with a frightened look. "I do not understand what you mean. George thinks so highly of you, and I am sure your brother quite idolizes you."

Gerard winced. Even at this moment, when he had become assured of Clara's love, the loss of Harold's affection came across him with a sharp pang.

"He did once," he said, sadly. "But that is all over now. I have no friend left but you—if you will still be my friend."

"Surely, Miss Garnock——"

"Don't speak of her," interrupted Gerard, in great agitation. He felt as if it were treason to Effie for Clara to mention her at this moment.

Clara was silent—looking startled and hurt. Gerard went on, vehemently:

“Clara! I loved Effie once. I was engaged to her for two years. I was as happy as a man could be till you came to London in February. I saw you two or three times, and then I grew faithless to Effie—faithless to my own word—careless of my own honour. Harold found out my weakness. He—I cannot tell you how he spoke to me. Effie put an end to everything between us—she was most generous, and most merciful. George was the only person who knew of our engagement—he knows how it ended. He despises me. Do *you*, Clara, now you know all?”

“I—I cannot—tell. I cannot—say—anything—just now,” replied Clara, in a broken voice.

“You do!” cried Gerard, despairingly.

“I—I— Let me go—in. I—must—think. All this—is—such—a—dreadful—sho—ock.” She began to sob violently, and walked towards the house. Gerard followed in silence, involuntarily comparing Clara’s uncontrolled violence with Effie’s calm fortitude. At the hall-door she turned. “I—will write,” she sobbed out, and then ran upstairs. Gerard remained where she had left him, standing as though stupefied, till George came out of the drawing-room.

“Did you find Clara?”

“Yes. She thinks as you do,” said Gerard, moodily.

“Then it is all over between you?” cried George, in a joyful tone.

“No ; it is not,” replied Gerard, fiercely. “She has not decided yet. She will write. Good-bye,” he added, abruptly. “There is no use in my staying any longer.”

Neither of the former friends offered to shake hands. At the door Gerard turned, and said, “I must have Clara’s unbiassed decision.”

“I will do nothing to bias her,” replied George.

Gerard knew in his heart that it would make little difference. He felt sure that he had no chance with Clara. He told himself so all the next day ; but yet when the promised letter came, on the following morning, it seemed an unexpected blow to him. Clara wrote :

“Richmond, Friday.

“DEAR GERARD,

“I have come to the conclusion that what passed between us yesterday must be forgotten. I will not attempt to deny that I have loved you ; but I feel certain, that as, by your own confession, you are ‘fickle and faithless,’ it would not be for the happiness of either of us to become engaged. Having changed once you may change again, and I could never feel sure of your affection. I do not say this as a reproach, although I think it would have been

more generous to have told me at first, yesterday, what you told me at last. I will try to forgive you the great misery you have caused me, and shall always remain

“Your sincere Friend,
“CLARA E. MONRO.”

Gerard crumpled this note in his hand as soon as he had glanced through it, and stamped with indignation. “This is not her own,” he muttered. “It has been dictated to her.”

In ten minutes he was on his way to Richmond. He met George in the garden.

“I must see Clara,” he said, abruptly.

“You cannot. She is in her own room,” answered George, as coldly and shortly as the other had spoken.

“I shall not leave here until I have seen her. I must hear her own lips repeat what she has written.”

George’s eyes flashed angrily. “You think I have broken my word?” he said.

“I *know* that Clara’s own heart did not dictate that cold and cruel note.”

“If you doubt my word, there is no more to be said,” was George’s answer, in a tone of extreme indignation. As he spoke he left the room.

After a few minutes, Gerard rang the bell.

“Will you tell Miss Monro that I wish to see her, if you please?” he said to the servant who came.

This summons brought Clara, after some delay. She was very pale, and her eyes were swollen and heavy.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you, Clara," said Gerard, calmly and slowly ; " but I must know whether the letter I received from you contained the expression of your own feelings, uninfluenced by any one."

"Yes ; it did," replied Clara, rapidly, looking him full in the face, without the slightest touch of tenderness or pity in her voice and manner.

"Then I have nothing more to say," said Gerard, in the same calm tone with which he had spoken before.

"You have said too much," said Clara, angrily. "I do not know what right you have to come here, and gloat over the misery you have caused. Yes, I am not ashamed to own that it is misery. The world may call it shame for a woman to love an unworthy object ; but *I* think the shame is to him who seeks a love of which he is not worthy. You have nothing to be proud of in having won my love—it was not to you as you are that my love was given—it was to you as my imagination made you. That *you* no longer exists. My love no longer exists. I could never love where I cannot respect." All this Clara had poured out with vehement rapidity. She stopped speaking at last from sheer want of breath, and

stood panting, with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks. Gerard said nothing.

“May I go?” asked Clara, after a short pause.

“*I do not wish to detain you,*” replied Gerard, coldly, and Clara left the room. Gerard walked through the open window into the garden, and so away.

He walked home; and thought all the way—not of Clara, but of Effie. His love to Clara—originally founded upon the gratification which his vanity received from her undisguised preference for him—^t had become utterly extinct as soon as that foundation was destroyed, by the mortifying change in her feelings towards him. In striking contrast to this change, his memory presented him with the unshaken fidelity evident in Effie’s every word and look during his parting interview with her. Effie had tried to screen his faults towards her even from himself. Clara’s conduct brought out those faults in more glaring colours than they had ever before appeared to him, and overwhelmed him with the sense of his own unworthiness and of Effie’s excellence—his unworthiness as far as Effie was concerned; but he refused to acknowledge the justice of the Monros’ condemnation of him; and whilst he felt deep remorse with regard to Effie, and entire forgiveness of Harold, he nourished towards Clara and her brother as much resentment as was possible to his open and forgiving temper.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Effie returned to Gateshill, after three months' absence, Harold saw no further cause for uneasiness about her. The trip to Switzerland had not only dissipated all the bad effects of her sorrow, but she now appeared in much better health and higher spirits than she had ever done before that sorrow came upon her. She was also much changed in other respects. All girlish timidity and diffidence had vanished. She was now resolute, self-confident, and slightly inclined to be dictatorial. Having formerly lived quite abstracted from the world around her—in a world of her own, of which Gerard was the centre—she now for the first time became fully alive to all the interests of her home. With this awakening came the consciousness that many things in that home were not as they should be ; and, like all young reformers, she began to attack time-honoured abuses with more ardour than discretion. All the energies which had been chained up in her love were now let

loose, to find what work they could, and finding a large field ready for their labour, they began vigorously to plough it up, and plant it afresh. Jessie's shortcomings provided this field. There were the children to train and educate, in good earnest; Harold to comfort and encourage; the disorderly household to remodel and to regulate. Effie never stopped to consider whether all this was really her work, or whether in this case, as in many others, forbearance might not be a higher duty than zeal. She merely saw that duties were left undone; she felt in herself powers which wanted exercise; and she set these powers to work upon those duties, gradually more and more widening their scope, till insensibly she usurped a position to which she had no right.

Jessie, who during Effie's absence had constantly felt the want of her help, was glad enough to be relieved of the extra work which had devolved upon her ever since her sister's illness. When she found that Effie was daily taking more and more upon herself, she was at first quite willing that it should be so. But when Harold—finding in Effie the intelligent listener and sympathetic friend whom he had hoped for, but never found, in Jessie—fell into the habit of giving his sister-in-law the attention and the confidence which should have been given to his wife; when the servants began to pass by their mistress, and look to her sister for their orders; when the

children gave unequivocal expression to their belief that their mother was only a subject in their aunt's kingdom—then Jessie grew jealous of the power and the affection which she had lost, and her sister had won.

Harold did not now, as formerly, find excuses for his wife's outbursts of temper, at least not when Effie was the sufferer from them. Ever since Gerard's defection his brother had been actuated by a desire to make every possible atonement to Effie, and he therefore treated her with the most chivalrous tenderness—exerting himself to spare her in every way, and taking her part at all times, even against his wife.

Effie was little affected by her sister's jealousy. She had grown callous to Jessie's outbreaks; and the only result of the discomfort they caused her was that she took refuge in the studio, or, dislodged from there, fled to some of the friends who were always ready to receive her. Effie had become a general favourite in Gateshill, and Jessie had become as generally unpopular. This was another cause of complaint, which gave Jessie a strong distaste for the Gateshill visiting, and a much greater relish for society where her beauty had a fuller sway than amongst those who were beginning to suspect that her character did not correspond with her appearance. So poor Harold was dragged to all the great London parties for

which he had invitations, and Effie was left to represent the family at the quiet little Gateshill festivities.

Very quiet and monotonous these festivities were; slow, decorous dinner-parties at Samuel Butterfield's and at the Martyns'; an annual dance given by Mr. Butterfield's mother; an occasional tea-and-talk gathering at Mr. Rogers'; and, once every spring, the great event of a Subscription Ball at the Falcon — these were the wildest gaieties to which Gateshill ever aspired. To all these Effie was a patient victim. She fell a prey to the youngest and shyest man in company at Mr. Martyn's or his son-in-law's dinners; played quadrilles, or guided unskilled feet through their mazes, at Mrs. Butterfield's dances; humoured gouty old gentlemen, and condoled with asthmatic old ladies, at the doctor's soirées; and knocked herself up for a week by dancing with all the Gateshill young men in the small, hot Assembly Room at the Falcon. Harold was delighted to see her apparently enjoying these dissipations — Jessie wondered how she could endure them. They neither of them understood Effie. There had been no *enjoyment* in her life since Gerard had ceased to be a part of it; and *endurance* was as easy in company as in solitude, since the time when endurance had taken the place from which hope and joy had been driven. Harold trusted that she was forgetting Gerard; Jessie prophesied that she would soon be

consoled. The consolation proposed was almost too much for Effie's fortitude.

"Mrs. Martyn has been talking of you, Effie," said Jessie, as she and Harold came in from paying visits one Sunday afternoon, and found Effie telling stories to the children, by the drawing-room fire.

"Has she? I hope she has said something good of me."

"That is of course," observed Harold, kindly; "who is there that does not speak good of you, little woman?" Effie winced, as she always did when Harold unthinkingly used Gerard's name for her.

"Oh, of course," said Jessie, in rather an injured tone. "But she did not say so much of her own admiration as of another person's."

"Who is that?" asked Effie, almost eagerly.

"She likes to hear of her conquests, little vanity!" cried Harold, who was in a lively mood.

"Is it Miss Keene? I do so want to make a conquest of her."

"That old maid!" cried Jessie.

"Dear old lady! She reminds me of Aunt Elizabeth. Is it not she, then?"

"Jessie is speaking of a young man, instead of an old maid, are you not, Jessie?"

"Of course I am. Effie need not pretend to be so unconscious."

"Oh," said Effie, in a disappointed tone, and she began to play with little Freddie.

"Mrs. Martyn says that all Gateshill is talking of Nathaniel Butterfield's attention to you. What attention has he paid you, Effie?"

"Attention!" cried Effie, with rather a bitter little laugh. "I believe he danced twice with me the other night, and, I am not sure, but I think he asked me to take wine at supper. And he bowed to me from the top of the omnibus yesterday; and—yes I actually have an indistinct remembrance that, not very long ago, he shook hands with me going into church, and asked after 'Mrs. Yonge and the little folks.'" Effie was here wicked enough to mimic the rather peculiar voice of her supposed lover.

"For shame, Effie!" exclaimed Jessie. "Nathaniel Butterfield is a most excellent young man."

"I am not saying anything against his excellence—all that I deny is his attention to me."

"Mrs. Martyn says that everybody remarks it; and I thought she rather implied that his family were not very well pleased—did not you, Harold?"

"I should think not," Effie broke in with, before Harold could answer. "Fancy old Mr. Butterfield's horror! I can imagine his reproof to his son, if he had any such intentions as you impute to him, 'Nathaniel, I hope no son of mine will ever be so wanting to himself and his family as to throw himself

away upon a penniless girl like that. Take example by your brother Samuel. Since he has married a clear five hundred a year, with expectations, I may reasonably require that you, and your other brothers, should do no less.' ”

“ For shame ! ” cried Jessie again, though she had been unable to help laughing at Effie’s imitation of the pompous, mercenary old attorney. “ Harold, is it not wrong of her to laugh at such estimable people as the Butterfields ? ”

Harold abhorred sarcasm ; but he would not find any fault with Effie, however much she indulged in it, as she had very frequently done of late.

“ Well, I only know you must have given Nathaniel great encouragement,” observed Jessie, irritated by her sister’s indifference to the news she was full of.

Effie was no longer indifferent now. She turned very pale, but asked quite calmly, “ What do you mean by encouragement, Jessie ? ”

“ Mean ? Why, that you must have tried to gain his affections.”

“ What should I want of ‘ his affections ? ’ ” asked Effie, contemptuously.

“ I suppose you must want the triumph of a lover,” answered Jessie.

“ Triumph ! ” repeated Effie, with a bitterness that made Harold shudder.

“ My poor child ! ” he cried, suddenly drawing

Effie to him. "No wonder you speak with contempt of any man's affection."

"I have no reason to speak with contempt," asserted Effie, firing up at the implied censure on Gerard. "I have a great respect for all affection—except Mr. Butterfield's—or what Jessie supposes Mr. Butterfield to entertain towards me."

"Mrs. Martyn told us a piece of news which I know will interest you, Effie," said Harold, anxious to change the subject of conversation.

"What is that?" asked Effie, who made a point of always being interested in what Harold had to tell.

"George Monro is coming to be curate here."

"George Monro!" cried Effie, with no longer *assumed* interest.

"Not to be curate, Harold," said Jessie; "Mr. Weekes is the curate—but, what do they call it?—he is not to be paid anything."

"No, I know," said Effie. "I think it is called getting a Title, when a young man first takes Orders. But are you sure it is true that he is coming here?"

"Quite sure," returned Jessie, who had recovered her good-temper when she found her sister was not indifferent to all the news she could tell. "He wrote to Mr. Crashawe to ask to come here about a month ago, but, you know, that was before Mr. Mason was taken ill, and so Mr. Crashawe answered that he had one under curate, or whatever it is, and did not

want another. But he said at the time that he was sorry to refuse Mr. Monro, as he had heard a good deal of him from some friend ; and so, when Mr. Mason had to leave, he wrote to George again, and said he could have him now, and George accepted directly. That was only yesterday, and he is coming to see Mr. Crashawe early in the week. He is to be settled here very soon—in the little cottage covered with ivy facing the green.”

“I fancy Mrs. Martyn was flying to premature conclusions there, Jessie,” observed Harold. “I cannot think that Monro has settled on his house when he has not yet seen the place at all.”

“Well, he will see it very soon ; and I dare say he will fix on that house—it would just suit him.”

Jessie was right ; George did fix on the cottage facing the green. But, in this case, the prediction was the cause of its own fulfilment. George came to Prior’s Mount early on the Monday morning, directly after his interview with his Vicar. Jessie very soon broached the question of his dwelling, and expressed her opinion of the merits of Ivy Cottage. George had hardly given a thought to the subject ; and he was now thinking much more earnestly where Effie could be, and whether he should have to leave without seeing her, so he gave his entire approval of the abode proposed for him, and readily agreed that Jessie should take him to see it after luncheon. The

children's lessons were never interrupted for any visitor; so, though Effie knew that George was in the drawing-room, his suspense was not relieved till it was time for the little boys to go for their morning walk. Then Effie ran in for a moment to shake hands with him before dressing to take her charges out. They had not met since they parted at Lucerne. George's feeling for Effie had not cooled in the interval, as was sufficiently evident in his manner when he saw her. When he found she was going to walk with the children, he could not resist accompanying them, at the risk of appearing rude to Jessie.

"I am so glad you are coming to live here, Mr. Monro," said Effie, as they began their walk, the three little boys bowling their hoops on in front.

"Thank you, Effie," said George, in such a tone that Effie felt rather doubtful whether she ought to be glad. There was a pause, and then George began again, in the same alarming tone, "My conscience is not easy on that score, Effie. I ought not to be actuated by any motives but the highest in choosing the ground on which to begin my work. But I am afraid that I have allowed other motives to creep in. To be near you was an irresistible temptation."

"And you are now really beginning the work which you have had at heart for so long," remarked Effie, conveniently deaf to the latter part of his speech.

“Yes. I only hope Mr. Crashawe will give me plenty of parish work.”

“I think there is no doubt of that. He does not like visiting himself, and Mr. Weekes is not popular amongst the poor people.”

“Do you know many of the poor people?”

“No, very few. I have always plenty of occupation at home—and then Harold does not much approve of what he calls ‘pauperizing our neighbours.’”

“But surely friendly intercourse is not pauperizing?”

“Not friendly intercourse. But here all the intercourse between the poor people and their richer neighbours consists in begging on the one hand, and giving a mixture of alms and admonitions on the other. Is that *your* idea of friendly intercourse?”

“Certainly not. My idea is that those who are higher on the social ladder should extend a helping hand to those who are lower—a *hand*, not a *purse*—a hand to support, to guide, to comfort. Manual labourers have neither time nor opportunity to enlarge their minds, and a familiar friend amongst those whose views are more extended is an invaluable acquisition to them. That is the kind of intercourse which I shall endeavour to establish amongst the various classes in Gateshill. Do you approve?”

“Oh, yes,” cried Effie, eagerly.

“And will you help me?”

“Yes, if I can—in any way that I can,” answered Effie, carried away, as she always was, by George’s enthusiasm.

“And will you come and listen to my first sermon?” asked George, timidly.

“I should have thought you would beg all your friends to stay away on that occasion.”

“All others I might. Not *you*—your presence would excite, but not alarm me. I know you would not be an unkind critic.”

“I am accused of being a very harsh critic. I think I am of Mr. Crashawe’s sermons—they do not please me at all. But, Mr. Monro, you must not expect to find us good, church-going people. We are terrible reprobates. Mr. Crashawe would give you a sad character of us.”

“Then I may find as much to do here as if I had set to work amongst the Bohemians in one of the overcrowded London parishes?” said George.

“Yes, if you propose to yourself our conversion.” George had spoken lightly himself; but when Effie answered in the same tone it jarred upon him, and his voice was almost solemn as he asked—

“Do you remember my telling you how I was first seriously impressed by the truths which had before fallen only upon my ear, without penetrating to my heart?”

"Yes," whispered Effie, moved, not so much by the thought of *what* as of *when* he had told her.

"And with that remembrance—with the remembrance of many such words—such looks—as those which aroused me, can you speak of still needing conversion?"

"Ah," said Effie, sadly, "those impressions have all died out now."

"Effie! if I thought that of you I should be very wretched."

"I would not make you wretched—but it is the fact. Walter, give Freddie back his hoop-stick."

"I have broken mine, Auntie."

"Then come and walk with me. You must not take Freddie's."

"If I walk with you will you tell me a story?"

"Perhaps Mr. Monro will?"

George began at once; but his story was more for the aunt than for the nephew, to whom it afforded little amusement, although he liked listening to the deep musical tones of the narrator's voice.

"Once upon a time," said George, in true story-book style, "there was a boy—a careless, thoughtless, selfish schoolboy. One lovely spring day he came to a little village, nestling against the side of a hill. A beautiful old church looked down upon the village—like a father looking down upon his children. All around the church were graves

covered with soft green grass, and decorated with beautiful flowers, lying beneath the shade of tall lime-trees. From the churchyard a gate opened on to a smooth green lawn, spreading before the windows of a fine old-fashioned parsonage house. Through the garden—rich with bright flowers and luxuriant trees—there gurgled and danced a merry little stream ; and it danced, and leaped, and frolicked all down the hill, in and out amongst the cottages, till it plunged into the river in the valley below. The cottages were all covered with laburnum, and clematis, and honeysuckle, and the gardens were gay with pinks, and stocks, and wallflowers. And all round about the cottages there were orchards of apple and pear trees in fullest blossom, children playing on the shady grass beneath them. When the boy first saw all this, he thought he was in a perfect paradise, but the next day he was sure of it. He slept soundly after his journey, in a little inn near the river—the lowest down the hill of all the village. He was awakened by a merry peal of bells, which seemed to be sounding from the clear blue sky overhead. He had to look up at the church and the parsonage-house to convince himself that they were earthly chimes. Later in the morning he walked up the hill, amongst groups of neat, bright-faced cottagers. With them he went into the little church, and seated himself near the open door, where he could look down the

village to the glittering river, and across to the soft green hills beyond. But soon he had no eyes for the view outside. An old clergyman, with snow-white hair, and a bright, loving face, came into the reading-desk, and then all the people rose up and sang a simple, touching hymn. Then the clergyman began to read in a clear, pathetic voice, and all the people said the responses heartily and as one man. For the first time in his life, the boy understood the true meaning of our church's morning service. But soon he began to understand more than that. When the venerable old man mounted the pulpit-stairs, and began his simple, earnest sermon, the boy's heart stirred as it had never stirred before. It seemed to him that he was listening to the voice of a good shepherd, going before his sheep, and enticing them after him by his gentle, loving words—not driving them before him with threats and violence, as so many—— Oh dear!" cried George, suddenly interrupting himself. "I am getting quite out of my listener's depth, and—— Effie! I beg your pardon! How thoughtless I have been!" For the tears were raining down Effie's cheeks.

"Oh, no; I like it so much. I think your story is beautiful, is not it, Walter?"

"No; it will not do," said George. "I was forgetting myself—and here we are home again—and I have been wasting all our walk!"

Effie did go to hear George's first sermon ; and she then experienced something of what he described himself as feeling when he heard her father preach. There were many who were deeply impressed by the young deacon's words that afternoon. His manner was calm, and his style quite without any graces of oratory ; but there was a fervour in his eyes, and an earnestness in his voice, which at once impressed his hearers with his sincerity ; and his original mode of treating familiar subjects took entire hold of their attention. Effie sat entranced during the whole twenty minutes that he was speaking ; and when she left the church she carried in her mind entire passages of his sermon. Of his text, "God is love," he had said that he chose those words for the subject of his first sermon because he considered that they must be the beginning and the end, the motive and the object, of all true religious teaching. Only he who had some faint conception, however imperfect, of the love of God, could be truly religious, because he only could love God. Again, without some love it was impossible to understand love. "To the man who loves only himself," he said, "all manifestations of love are folly. Show him a mother with her child, tell him that to her its unformed features are perfect beauty, its inarticulate murmurs the divinest music, he will regard her as a maniac. Show him a husband who lives only for his wife's smile, who counts no

labour too heavy, no sacrifice too entire for her sake, this devotion will appear to him like imbecility. But to him who has learnt to love, the mother is no maniac, but simply a loving woman, the husband is no dotard, but a true man." This explained why strong human love was not only permitted, but sanctioned. Human love was the means by which to attain some knowledge of divine love. "The love of the mother for her child—of the husband for his wife—is the germ of that love which we should all feel for Him Who is Love—which we *must* all feel for Him if we could once thoroughly understand that He *is* Love. Even amongst men, he is looked upon as cold-hearted and ungrateful who repays love—even unaccompanied by benefits—with dislike or indifference—what must he be who repays with dislike or indifference that love which has been manifested in Creation, Redemption, Sanctification?" The danger was that human love, instead of the means, should be regarded as the end. "If the object which was given to teach us how to love God is made an obstacle to hide God from our eyes, then we have set up an idol, and we draw down the penalty for idolatry, not only upon ourselves, but upon our idol. On the other hand, he who makes his earthly love the stepping-stone to heavenly love, benefits not himself only, but the object of that earthly love." Then came the preacher's exhortation. "You from whom God in

His infinite mercy has taken away the idol which hid Him from your eyes, you who have learnt, with bitter pain, that the perfection you believed in is not to be found on earth, you who have proved, after many trials, that human love can never satisfy an immortal soul—turn all of you to that Love which never dies, that Perfection which is infinite, that Satisfaction which is eternal.” From all this the practical consideration was deduced : “ All who have loved—and who would except himself from that number?—know that love is no inactive sentiment. The first stirring of love in the heart is shown in the desire to please, to serve the beloved. Every boy can testify of ungenial tasks done cheerfully to gain the approval of a parent. Every man can remember distasteful labours undertaken to oblige a friend. Every woman could tell of secret deeds of kindness to a husband or a child. If uncalled-for, undeserved love must manifest itself in outward acts, what can be too much to expect from even the feeblest love to Him, Who first loved us? What, short of the entire offering of ourselves—of our hearts, our lives, our every thought and work—can give evidence that we have mastered the first rudiments of the lesson that ‘ God is Love ? ’ ”

“ He who sets up an idol draws down the penalty for idolatry, not upon himself only, but upon his idol.” These words rang in Effie’s ears for many days. She would have borne anything to spare

Gerard, and yet what had she brought upon him? It was for her that he who so valued approbation was condemned by all his friends; it was for her that he who so clung to old associations was a stranger to all his former haunts. And why was this? For the first time her conscience answered, "Because he was set up as an idol." "But that was my fault; why should he be punished?" In the light of the words she had just heard, she had the answer, "Love punishes in mercy—sorrow is not necessarily evil." Then came the question, darting through her mind like a flash of light, "Then could I benefit him if I were to make my love for him the stepping-stone to heavenly love?" Something seemed to answer, "Yes ;" and the first step was taken. From that day Effie set herself diligently to work to learn the lesson of which George had spoken. At the very outset she remembered that she had never been confirmed; and the first evidence she gave of more serious thoughts was by joining the confirmation-classes which Mr. Crashawe began to hold at the beginning of Lent. Then came the moving Rite itself; and after that George induced her to enrol herself amongst his newly-established district visitors, and also amongst Mr. Crashawe's pet Sunday-school teachers. So, within six months of George's first sermon, Effie found that she was committed to a profession of religion much higher than the standard

of her home; and that, almost without her own consciousness, she had adopted the character—then comparatively rare, and frequently regarded with ridicule—of a “serious young lady.”

This was all, or nearly all, external. Effie could do nothing by halves, and when she was once forcibly struck with any idea she could not rest till she had put it in practice. George’s sermon had furnished such an idea, and she had at once flown to the most practical way of carrying it out. Once entered on this road, she was allowed no halt—George’s enthusiasm drove her onward. And yet, all the time, the idolatry of which her conscience had been convinced was rampant within her. The religious duties she had undertaken were, in fact, a superstitious offering to avert the evils which she accused herself of having brought upon Gerard.

These duties gave her a good deal of wholesome occupation, and a good deal of equally wholesome annoyance. In spite of her natural self-deception as to her own motives, she began her work in an exalted state of mind, and with a full expectation of finding all her fellow-workers refined and elevated by the purity of their motives. Her first experience of a District Visitors’ Meeting would have been a bitter disappointment had not her sense of humour neutralized her sense of pain.

Eight ladies, between the ages of twenty and fifty,

were assembled in Mr. Crashawe's study, about an equal number having sent excuses for their absence. The Rector and his second Curate were in their places; and after Mr. Crashawe had opened the proceedings by a short prayer, he asked the lady on his right hand, "Have you anything to report, Mrs. West?"

Mrs. West, a stout, heavy-faced elderly woman, began in a slow, monotonous kind of plaint: "The Quimpers have been a great trouble to me—a very great trouble. Of course I consider it my duty to visit them regularly; but twice the door has been shut in my face, and only last Thursday—no, it must have been Friday, because Mr. West went to the Bank that day—when I offered Mr. Quimper that most awakening little tract, 'A Word to the Sinner,' he said he did not want any such words; those the cap fitted might wear it; and then he went on in a most insolent manner about an Englishman's house being his castle, and he did not see why a poor man might not choose his own visitors as well as a rich man."

"I quite agree with him there," said George Monro to the Rector.

"I think in this case it would be as well to discontinue your visits, Mrs. West. I don't remember the tract you mention. Surely it is not in our library."

"No, Mr. Crashawe, it is not. I think there is a lamentable want of awakening power in the books lent by this society, so I bought a number of tracts

recommended to me by a valued friend of mine, who, though himself an Independent Christian, has no prejudice against the ministers of the Establishment, as long as they preach Evangelical truth—as he said to me——”

“Of course—of course,” interrupted Mr. Crashawe. “I should like to look at the tracts you lend, Mrs. West; and as for the Quimpers, I would advise you not to go there again. Anything else in your district?”

“No, Mr. Crashawe; nothing else. About the Quimpers——”

“I will take your report, if you please, Miss East,” said Mr. Crashawe, hastily.

Effie thought the Vicar rather deficient in politeness; but she soon learnt that “the Quimpers” were the *bête noire* of the Gateshill District Visitors’ Society.

Miss East was a tall, thin, elderly young lady, who spoke fast and loud. “I think you or Mr. Monro should call on the Leonards—the family who have lately come to No. 3 Mill Stream Lane. They seem very respectable people; but the woman is most distressingly ignorant on the subject of Church principles. When I reprimanded her for being absent from church, last Sunday, her excuse was: ‘Well, miss, Leonard likes to lay a-bed a little on Sunday morning, and we weren’t quite in time for

Mr. Crashawe's, so we turned into Mr. Warmham's, the Baptist Chapel in the lane! I did my best to point out to her the extreme wickedness of dissent; but she was not at all inclined to acknowledge her error, or to yield to my arguments. Her answer was that dissent could not be wicked, as she had known many very good people who were dissenters. But perhaps she might pay more attention to you or Mr. Monro."

"Well, I think we need not be very unhappy about Mrs. Leonard," said Mr. Crashawe, with a smile. "Is that all, Miss East? Miss Fairbairn? Ah, I see you have written your report, as usual."

Miss Fairbairn, a pretty girl, with bright eyes, and a pleasant voice, gave the necessary explanations with straightforward simplicity, so that her report was soon over; and Mr. Crashawe went on: "Mrs. Evans, have you anything to tell us of your district?"

"The Popes have got the measles. Johnnie—the youngest boy—is very bad indeed. He is just as my Tom was with them. We thought we must have lost him; and Mr. Snow—that was when we were living at Wandsworth—Mr. Snow was Dr. Gane's partner, a very estimable young man, and clever, too—I'm sure he was most successful in his treatment of Tom. The poor little fellow was so weak he could not stand, and his eyes were so bad we were obliged to keep the room quite dark—we had no hope but that we must lose him—Mr. Evans said to me——"

"Then you think little Tommie—Johnnie Pope is not likely to pull through?"

"I won't say that. My Tom was, as I was saying, more like a corpse than a live child. Mr. Snow said to me, 'Mrs. Evans, we never despair of a child's life; but in this case I can hardly say that we may hope.' He ordered a large mustard-plaister all along——"

"Has Rogers seen little Pope?"

"Yes. I went round and asked him to call in yesterday. He gives no hope at all—but then I think Mr. Rogers is never hopeful enough. When my James had rheumatic fever Mr. Rogers quite gave him up; but Dr. Baines took a much more favourable view of the case, and now James is as strong as ever."

"Are there any other cases of measles in your district?"

"No, Mr. Crashawe. Bobbie Stevens has broken his arm, but it is going on very well. When my Joe broke his arm—that was when we were living at Hoxton—Mr. Quail, the medical man there, said that a broken arm was a very slight affair with a healthy boy—and Joe was a remarkably healthy boy. When they all had the scarlatina, Joe was not two whole days in bed; and with the whooping-cough——"

"Then you don't think we need concern ourselves much about Bob Stevens. Miss Leafe, what have you to tell us?"

Miss Leafe, a feeble-looking little girl, began in low, trembling tones: "There is fever in my district, so Papa thought I had better not go to any of the houses. I met Mrs. Howes in the town yesterday, and she told me that George Bailey was dying; but Papa said poor people always exaggerate, so I need not trouble you about it."

"It was no exaggeration," said George Monro, sternly. "He died this morning."

"Mr. Monro had been with him constantly for the last week," added Mr. Crashawe.

"You need not be frightened away from your duty, Miss Leafe; the fever is not infectious," said George, still so severely that the poor little culprit began first to tremble visibly, and then to cry—utterly broken-hearted at having incurred the displeasure of the handsome curate, for whose sake alone she had undertaken the, to her, most trying task of district visiting.

"And you, Miss Sharp?" asked Mr. Crashawe, turning abruptly from the unfortunate Miss Leafe.

"The Cobbs pretend to be in great distress," said Miss Sharp; "but I tell them they won't find me easy to impose upon. I know real poverty when I see it, and I don't see it there."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Sharp," said George. "I heard yesterday, from a most reliable source, that the Cobbs are, entirely without any fault of their own, utterly destitute; and, if a benevolent stranger

had not heard of their dire necessity, Mrs. Cobb might have been actually starved to death."

"I beg *your* pardon, Mr. Monro, but you must allow me to believe that your benevolent stranger was taken in by Mrs. Cobb's plausible tongue. However, we won't dispute that matter. There is nothing else to say of my district, Mr. Crashawe."

"Mrs. Page?" said Mr. Crashawe, addressing a tall, gaunt lady, dressed in very light garments.

"I have no complaints to make of the *physical* state of my district; but alas! I have much—sadly too much—to say of its heathen darkness. I go from house to house—weak instrument as I am—endeavouring to win some souls—but all in vain. I am met on all hands with neglect and evil words. It is indeed true of this unhappy town that it 'lieth in wickedness, taken captive of the devil at his will.' "

"Yes," said Mr. Crashawe, impatiently. "Monro, will you look up Mrs. Page's district? That is all, I think." It was evident that Mr. Crashawe did not expect much help from the visiting ladies whom George had organized; but George was a host in himself, and he managed to give something of his own spirit to a few, amongst whom was his sister Clara, who had now come to live with him.

CHAPTER XVI.

"EFFIE! Look at my face!" cried Jessie Yonge, bursting into the room where her sister was teaching the two elder boys, one bright morning in May.

"Well," said Effie, carelessly, vexed at the interruption.

"Well!" repeated Jessie. "Don't you see what a figure I am?"

"Your face is swelled, is it not? Then I suppose you have lost all the pain."

"Yes; but isn't it provoking. How can I possibly go to-night? How coolly you take it!"

"Oh, I forgot about to-night. Yes, it is tiresome. But perhaps the swelling will go down before the evening. Walter, those up-strokes are too thick."

"How absurd you are, Effie! As if it were likely to go down. Most likely by the evening my face will be as big as two."

"Oh, what fun!" shouted Davie.

"No ; it is not fun, sir," cried his mother, angrily. "How can you allow that boy to be so insufferably rude, Effie?"

"Attend to your sum, Davie," said Effie. "That line is all wrong. That is not the way to make a *g*, Walter."

"Much sympathy I get from you!" exclaimed Jessie, indignantly. "Harold, come here!" she added, as she heard her husband's step in the hall. "Effie thinks it is of no consequence that my face is like *this*."

"Papa! Mamma is going to have two faces," cried the incorrigible Davie.

"The more the better, Davie," said Harold. "We cannot have too many faces like hers, can we?"

"Like *this*?" asked Jessie, a little mollified by her husband's complimentary tone.

"What is wrong with the face?" asked Harold, as she turned it towards him.

"Cannot you see? That shows how little you have studied my face."

"I can see no fault in it," persisted Harold. "Is it too red, or too white, or what?"

"There, Jessie; Harold does not see the swelling, so it cannot be much," remarked Effie.

"He does not take sufficient interest in my face, usually, to know when there is any alteration in it."

"Is it swollen?" asked poor Harold, in desperation.

"*Is it swollen,*" mimicked Jessie. "Of course it is swollen, so that I am not fit to be seen."

"Never mind that, if you have lost the pain," said Harold, cheerfully.

"And how am I to go to-night?"

"To go where?"

"To the ball, of course. You are as bad as Effie. I believe you, neither of you, think anything about the ball—the only morsel of amusement that we have in the whole year. I believe you are both glad that I shall not be able to go. You are always glad that I should lose any pleasure. And here have I been for two days in such agony—if you had any feeling you would have been rejoicing in the prospect of my having anything to divert my mind—I know it is my mind—it is all nonsense about a decayed tooth—I have not a decayed tooth in my head; but when I am day after day, and month after month, without the slightest relaxation or amusement, it is not very wonderful that my nerves should get out of order. But you care nothing for that. I believe you are never, either of you, so happy as when I am ill and in pain. And it is very seldom I am not ill. I don't complain, so nobody knows what I suffer. I am sure I don't know how it is to end. My constitution is gradually breaking up. I shall not last much longer to be a burden to you—I——"

"Mamma is naughty!" cried Walter, suddenly for-

getting his copy, and looking at his mother with wide-open eyes. "Mamma is crying!"

"Come for a run in the garden, Walter," said Effie, hastily. "Come, Davie."

"No, Effie; you shall not escape in that way," cried Jessie. "I don't often speak, but I cannot be silent for ever. You and Harold both know that I am ill and miserable, and you cannot either of you spare a moment to comfort me. You both try to run away directly I make the slightest complaint. You will go off to the ball to-night, and leave me to a wretched solitary evening, and then——"

"I shall go to no ball without you, Jessie," interrupted Harold.

"I am sure I do not care for the ball," said Effie. "Run, Davie, and pick some violets for Mamma. Walter, you go and help him. Harold, take her into some other room," she added, in an authoritative tone, when the little boys were gone. "I cannot have the children so interrupted at their lessons."

"*She* cannot have!—hear her!" cried Jessie. "May I not do as I like with my own children? Nobody would believe they *were* my children, to hear how they speak to me. But of course they catch the general tone towards me. Every one is against me. There never was such a wretched woman as I am. And now to be deprived of this ball, which would have been some distraction to me—and that you two should be rejoicing

over my disappointment — and making every one think that it is my vanity keeps me at home.”

“I have said that I shall remain at home with you, Jessie,” said Harold.

“And then, I suppose, you will tell every one that *I* prevented you and Effie from going to the ball?” remarked Jessie.

“No one will inquire why I am not there; and as for Effie, I shall ask her to avoid all questions by going as she intended. Mrs. Mortlake will take charge of her.”

“Oh, of course,” cried Jessie, bitterly; “Mrs. Mortlake will be delighted, and no one will miss *me*. If Effie were kept at home, of course all Gateshill would be in despair.”

“Am I to have this room for the children; or must their lessons be given up for to-day?” asked Effie, impatiently.

“Oh, I will not be in your way,” said Jessie. “I will not interfere with my own children. I suppose I had better go to bed again. I seem to be in every one’s way when I am up. And I am sure I only feel fit for bed.”

“You will go to this stupid ball, Effie?” asked Harold, as soon as Jessie had left the room.

“Oh, yes, if you think I had better.”

“I do think so. It would seem so strange for us all to be absent after taking tickets.”

"Very well," said Effie, wearily. "It will be very dull," she thought. "But, at any rate, I shall have some pleasant talk with George Monro."

"I must go and see if I can comfort poor Jessie," said Harold, going slowly out of the room. "Ah, my beauty!" he cried in an altered tone, as he opened the door.

"Auntie, me do 'essons," said the little three-year-old, whom Harold brought back in his arms.

"What, *you* do lessons before Freddie, Isa! That would never do."

"Me do 'essons lite bid boyd," persisted the little girl.

"Will you go to a ball with Auntie, Isa?" asked Harold.

"Me go ball with Auntie," repeated the child, gravely.

"Some day, my darling," said the father, looking proudly at his beautiful little daughter. Harold's face had quite lost the vexed look. The child had charmed away the pain which her mother had caused.

"My darling!" cried Harold again, as he smoothed back the clustering golden curls, and looked into the clear blue eyes. "Effie," he asked, suddenly, "what is an idol?"

Effie smiled, and pointed to the child.

"It is true," said Harold, gravely. "I suppose

you good people would call me very wicked, but I believe this mite is my idol. Come, Isa, let's go and race the butterflies. I will send the boys in, Effie."

"Me no' ant dey 'ude boyd," said Isa, demurely, as she went out, perched on her father's shoulder.

Effie had plenty to do that day, besides the necessary preparations for the ball; there was Jessie to be soothed, if possible, and Harold to be consoled for the hard things his wife had said to him. Effie always set herself this task when Jessie was in one of her disagreeable moods; and she therefore spent the whole afternoon in the studio, reading manuscripts, admiring sketches, and listening to plans. The silent man delighted in a sympathetic listener when he was inclined to be confidential.

Jessie, left to herself, had reached her penitent stage by the evening; and her tragic self-condemnation was sadly out of character with the comic appearance of her distorted face. The comedy of the situation was increased by the sudden entrance of Mrs. Mortlake, arrayed in a wonderful garment of yellow China crape, with a turban-like erection on her head. "Miss Effie, I am perfectly overwhelmed with the honour—ye gods, what do I see? '*Lugete Veneres Cupidinesque!*' The glorious sun in its meridian splendour obscured. '*Formæ gloria fluxa atque fragilis.*' No, Mr. Yonge, I must not—

I have already incurred the dire wrath of all our beaux for delaying the appearance of the brightest star in the firmament of Gateshill."

"Yourself, Mrs. Mortlake?" asked Harold, mischievously.

"Mr. Yonge, I blush for you! '*Pessimum genus inimicorum laudantes.*' Mrs. Yonge, what consolatory message will you send to all those who will be desolated at your absence? Some of the fair sex, no doubt, will rejoice—woe's me that it must be said. A thousand thanks, Mr. Yonge!—a little higher—Miss Effie, are you warmly clad?—old Father Winter has not yet quite abdicated his— Ah, Mrs. Yonge, your æsthetic mind has flown to the May of the Poets—but, alas! alas! Come Miss Effie! Let us not dim our eyes by weeping for that fair ideal—the reality will nip our features, I warn— Well, Mr. Yonge, if you will honour me so far above my— Good-night, dear Mrs. Yonge—may our now fasting eyes soon have their usual feast of— Good-night;" and Mrs. Mortlake and her yellow robe vanished into the darkness, Effie following.

Effie often afterwards looked back with a kind of wonder to that quarter of an hour's drive, during which she listened so calmly to Mrs. Mortlake's flow of words, with no expectation of anything before her but the usual unexciting course of a Gateshill party. That course seemed to be beginning with its ac-

customed promise of placid monotony when she first had a quiet talk with George Monro on parish matters, and then was invited by Nathaniel Butterfield to join in a quadrille. Before that dance was over everything was changed—all calmness was gone.

“It is very pleasant dancing with the room so little crowded ; don’t you think so, Miss Garnock?”

“Yes, very—if the music were a little more inspiring.”

“I am sorry you don’t like the music. I thought it quite tasty. I am very partial to a horn and a fiddle. Arn’t you, Miss Garnock?”

“Yes, oh yes. How fashionable we are becoming at Gateshill—it is nearly ten o’clock, and hardly any one has come yet.”

“It is very foolish to be so late—don’t you think so, Miss Garnock? Now, what I say is, give me my money’s worth. I am not one to pay a good price for a ticket, and then to miss half the fun. As I said to Joe, ‘What’s the good of dropping in when all the nicest young ladies are engaged, and you have no chance of a partner worth looking at?’ Now, you see, I got my pick by coming early ; and I hope you will reward me several times this evening, eh, Miss Garnock?”

“Is not your brother Joseph coming to-night?” asked Effie, not desiring to answer the question put to her.

“Oh yes, Joe is coming some time or other. But I left him over his wine—him and Gerard Yonge. They did not seem either of them very keen about coming; and, between ourselves, Miss Garnock, I am afraid Yonge was taking more wine than he ought. I don't know what his brother thinks—but I fancy he is getting rather fast. Are you sure about this figure? I always get confused between this one and the next.”

Effie was not sure of anything—excepting that Gerard Yonge was then in Gateshill, and might be in the same room with her in another minute. She was nearly choked with agitation and dread—but above all there was a feeling of intense joy that she should see him once more.

“Why, Miss Garnock, I always tell my sisters they ought to take pattern by your dancing, and now you are out in the figures. I must not take up your attention so with my talk. It is your turn to advance.”

When Effie had returned to her place, and her partner was away, George Monro came close behind her, and asked, in a low voice, “Have you seen Gerard Yonge? he is here.”

“Thank you,” said Effie, frankly, for his thoughtful kindness moved her to forget for the moment that no one was to think Gerard Yonge's presence could be anything to her.

“What has Monro got to say to you, Miss Garnock?” asked Nathaniel Butterfield, jealously. “Is he finding fault with you for dancing? For my part, I don’t see that parsons have any business in a ball-room.”

“Mr. Monro does not disapprove of dancing,” said Effie, shortly.

“Well, he has made you look quite hipped with his solemn talk. It is not fair to come poaching on another man’s ground, and so I shall tell him. We must have an extra dance to-night, Miss Garnock ; this one has not gone well at all.”

“Then I had better sit down at once, and let you find a better partner for the next quadrille. I am very sorry I made so many blunders.”

“Don’t trouble about that, Miss Garnock. I am sure I shan’t think anything of them, and I am not at all keen about looking for another partner now. I had much rather take a few turns with you ; in fact, I— Well, Yonge, so you have got your legs from under the mahogany at last.”

“Yes, at last. It did require a great effort. Your father’s wine is excellent.” Gerard looked very much flushed and excited ; he spoke loud, and with a nervous laugh.

“Oh, Effie !” he cried, affecting surprise at the sight of her ; “how are you ? How are they all at home ?” He gave her hand an almost fierce pressure, and then dropped it suddenly. “There is Rogers !

I must go and speak to the old fellow." And he hurried away.

"You and Yonge are not so thick now as you used to be, eh, Miss Garnock?" asked Nathaniel.

"Gerard has not so much leisure time now as he had," Effie managed to say.

"From all accounts, he has leisure time enough for a good many wild pranks," remarked Nathaniel, little guessing how he was cutting away the ground under his own feet, whilst labouring to do that kind office for Gerard.

"I *must* sit down now, Mr. Butterfield," said Effie, faintly.

But sitting down was of little use, for her tormentor stood before her during the next quadrille, which she refused to dance. At last she caught George Monro's eye, and her beseeching glance brought him in a moment to her side. "Save me from that man," she whispered, in utter desperation.

"That is a nice cob your father rides, Mr. Butterfield. Is it allowable to ask what he gave for him?" said George, at once laying a trap into which he knew Nathaniel would fall.

"Well, you see, that was one of Joe's clever strokes," he began, forgetting his vexation with "the parson" in his delight at finding any fresh auditor for the story, which he had told again and again to every one in Gateshill.

Effie was left in peace, and the first use she made of her liberty was to look round for Gerard. She soon discovered him, dancing with Emily Butterfield. With George so near, she dared not watch him as she would have liked to do; but presently she perceived that he and his partner were reflected in a glass just beside her, and at that reflection she might gaze without fear. Without fear, but not without pain. Gerard was grievously changed in two years. His face had lost its bright boyish look, and had instead a careworn, restless expression.

Just now his manner was forced and unnatural; but that was probably owing to some embarrassment at being where he was, as well as to the excitement caused by Mr. Butterfield's "excellent wine." Effie was seized with a terrible fear that this excitement might lead him so far to forget himself as to ask her to dance; and that fear was increased when, directly the quadrille was finished, he came towards her, with his partner on his arm. He looked at her, but did not speak, and, turning full upon George, held out his hand. George hesitated, coloured violently, and at last coldly accepted the advance which he could not reject without attracting notice.

"I want to say a word to you, Nathaniel," said Emily Butterfield, drawing her brother aside; and then Gerard spoke rapidly to George, "I beg your pardon for forcing you to practise your own precepts

But I could not endure to be in the same room with you as a stranger, or an enemy ; and, not very long ago, I heard a very eloquent preacher on a text which said something about forgiving ‘seventy times seven times——’ ”

“ Were you in this church when I preached on *that* text ? ” cried George, in some agitation.

“ Yes ; and as I came out, I heard an old woman say, ‘ Dear ! what a comfortable preacher he be, to be sure ! ’ But it is not comfortable to have one’s hand taken as gingerly as if it were an electric eel.”

“ If it were an offence against myself,” muttered George, doubtfully.

“ Your sister will not even look at me,” remarked Gerard.

“ Well, Monro,” said Nathaniel, returning to George’s side, “ the best of it was that when Joe heard——”

The interesting history of the cob was doomed not to be related this evening. Directly George’s attention was reclaimed by Nathaniel, Gerard had turned to Effie. “ Will you dance with me ? ” he asked, humbly in tone, but with a slightly confident look.

Effie was in a terrible dilemma. She would not wound Gerard by refusing his request ; but she felt that she would do anything rather than accede to it.

“ I—I am afraid I am engaged,” she stammered, glancing in her desperation at Nathaniel, who was

flattered by the look, but did not understand its meaning. George did, and said quickly, "The dance is forming, Mr. Butterfield. Had you not better claim your partner?" as he spoke, he looked towards Effie, so that Nathaniel could not mistake the hint.

"Miss Garnock, shall we stand up?" and thus Effie escaped the dreaded dance with Gerard.

All the Gateshill gentlemen were eager to engage her, and she therefore went on from dance to dance, without sitting down. Once she had to give her hand to Gerard in "the Lancers," and once he addressed a few words to her at the refreshment-table. After supper she missed him from the dancing-room, and began to hope that he had left—or rather to say to herself that she hoped so, whilst she in reality felt an undefined sense of loss in his supposed departure. Whilst occupied with this feeling she unthinkingly agreed to dance with Nathaniel Butterfield for the fourth time that evening. She repented that she had done so when, in the course of the first figure, he said, slowly, his voice being more than usually thick, "Miss Garnock, I have something very particular to say to you."

"Indeed, Mr. Butterfield! A ball-room is hardly the place in which to say anything 'very particular.'"

"From a look you gave me before supper, I am encouraged to think that what I have to say will not be disagreeable to you."

Effie was very glad that the dance required her attention at that moment. When she returned to her partner, he immediately went on, "I have no doubt that you have been aware for some time that you are the object of my preference—you young ladies are so sharp in such matters."

"I assure you, Mr. Butterfield, I——"

"Oh, yes," he interrupted her, with a sly look of intelligence. "I know it is the fashion with young ladies to profess unconsciousness—Joe warned me of that; but as I was saying, now that I am in a position to marry, and can offer you a comfortable home, I am very anxious to have it all settled between us; that is, of course, if my feelings are reciprocated."

Again the requirements of the dance saved Effie from the necessity of immediately answering.

"I am most distressed at what you have said to me, Mr. Butterfield," she began, as soon as there was an opportunity of speaking. "I am very sorry that my manner should have so misled you."

"As to that, Miss Effie, I always considered your manner very proper and retiring. I am not partial to forward young ladies. Sometimes I have certainly thought you rather cold—but Joe said that was only to bring me on."

"Oh, no; I assure you, Mr. Butterfield, I never had such an idea. I have never looked upon you in any other light than as a friend."

“I wonder at that, Miss Garnock. Several persons have made game of me about you, and I have often been asked when I meant to propose. I thought you, who are so clever, would be sure to understand my intentions, particularly as it is several years now since I first began to be attached to you; in fact, it was when there was a talk that you were engaged to Gerard Yonge. I suppose there was no truth in that, was there, eh, Miss Garnock?”

At that moment Effie's ear caught the tones of Gerard's voice, raised in uproarious mirth. She did not know what question had been asked her; but as Nathaniel paused for an answer, and under the present circumstances, “no” seemed safer than “yes,” she said, “No, oh, no.”

“Then, if your affections are not engaged, I hope I may consider that my offer is favourably received. They say silence gives consent, eh, Miss Garnock?”

“Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Butterfield; it is not so now. I am very much obliged to you for the honour you have done me, but I cannot do as you wish. Really, I do not deserve the kind feeling you express for me—I—I—” she stopped, again forgetting everything in the horror of those sounds from the supper-room—all the more audible now that the music had ceased, and the dancers were walking about the room.

“As for that, Miss Garnock, you must not carry your modesty too far. I think no position could be

higher than you deserve ; and if I value a good disposition more than money or rank, surely no one else has anything to say in the matter."

"But really, Mr. Butterfield, I cannot care for you as you deserve."

"I am not a coxcomb, Miss Garnock. I don't think so highly of myself that I should require my wife to be a devoted slave. I like you better than any young lady I know ; and if you like me better than any other man, that is all I care about."

"But it is not all *I* care about, Mr. Butterfield," said Effie, growing rather indignant with her unromantic wooer.

"I am going into partnership with my father almost immediately, Miss Garnock. The articles are already drawn out. I shall have a good seven hundred pound a year to begin upon, and many girls would think that a very fair prospect."

"Indeed, Mr. Butterfield, I think you have very good prospects."

"Then, Miss Effie, I hope you will allow me to come to-morrow and speak to your brother-in-law ; we shall be able to arrange matters so, much better than in a ball-room. Don't you think so, Miss Garnock ?"

"Oh, yes, much better," answered Effie, mechanically, as she heard Gerard strike up a comic song—a thing which he had always formerly abhorred.

Nathaniel's look of triumph recalled her to herself. "No, no!" she cried, almost fiercely, "nothing of the sort. You must not come, indeed, Mr. Butterfield. It would be utterly useless. It would be quite impossible for me to marry you."

"I suppose you look higher, then, Miss Garnock," said Nathaniel, sullenly, hurt by the sudden fall from his momentary elation. "People do say you and your sister are very proud. Perhaps you think a solicitor beneath you. I know we don't rank so high as the Bar or the Church; but anyway a solicitor is above an artist, and you can't expect to do so much better than your sister."

"It would not be possible to do better," exclaimed Effie, now feeling an intense desire to quarrel with her admirer, as the only possible way of disposing of his suit.

"You will greatly oblige me if you will allow me to take a seat, Mr. Butterfield."

"It is very hard to have all my plans so upset, after having been partial to you for so many years, Miss Garnock," said Nathaniel, falling into a somewhat melting mood.

"You will soon find some one more worthy of you, Mr. Butterfield."

Thus dismissed, Nathaniel slowly withdrew, leaving Effie to meditate, not on the flattering proposal she had just received, but on how it would be possible to

stop those sounds which were such agony to her, and such a disgrace to him from whom they proceeded. The open door of the supper-room was at the farther end of the passage in which she was sitting. No one else was in the passage, and those who were round the door of the ball-room were not noticing her. Her resolution was quickly taken. For a moment she had thought of appealing to George ; but she shrank from the idea of betraying Gerard's weakness to any one more than was necessary — especially to George. Summoning up all her courage, and fixing her thoughts, not on the man who had been her lover, but on the boy whom her father had so loved, she walked down the passage, and into the disorderly supper-room, in which about a dozen noisy or stupid young men were lounging on the chairs or lolling over the table. Gerard was standing at the farther end of the room, joining in the chorus of a Bacchanalian song. Effie waited at the door, unobserved, until this was finished, and then walked straight up to Gerard.

“I have something very important to say to you, Gerard. Will you give me your arm into the other room?” she said, in a clear, distinct voice, loud enough to be heard by all around in the sudden hush caused by her presence. Gerard looked scared, but he gave her his arm at once, and she led him out of the room, shuddering to feel how unsteady his gait was.

Neither spoke till they reached the passage. Then she said, turning away from the ball-room, "Thank you. Now, will you go home?"

Gerard started, was silent for a moment, and then began to speak very slowly and carefully. "Effie, you think I have taken too much wine. I—I—assure you—I—that confounded hot room—has made me giddy—but—I— Come and have a waltz," he cried, suddenly, as an inspiring tune struck up; and before Effie could resist he had drawn her into the ball-room, and was whirling her round. Only for a few turns, however. He soon got out of step, and staggered against the wall. Effie, who was horrified to see Clara looking that way, managed to force him back into the passage, and then said, imploringly, "Gerard, go home."

"We won't go home till morning," sang out Gerard, to her utter dismay, as he leaned, almost helplessly, against the wall.

"Gerard, for Harold's sake, go home."

"Dear old fellow! 'For he's a jolly good fellow!'" came out again, in his full voice—thick now, and uncertain.

Effie, in an agony of terror and shame, dragged him farther along the passage. "Gerard! for pity's sake! Have you lost all sense of—" shame, she was about to say, but she was afraid of the effect reproaches might have, and altered her sentence. "Have you

forgotten the old days—have you forgotten Pixy-combe?”

“‘Suld auld acquaintance be forgot, and days of—’” he burst out again; but Effie interrupted him with the adjuration which she could not before make up her mind to use:—

“Gerard, for my father’s sake, go home!”

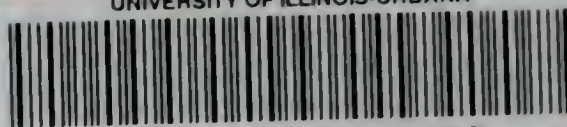
He looked at her as earnestly as a tipsy man can look, and then said, vacantly, “Yes,” and walked slowly and very unsteadily towards the stairs. He did not release Effie’s hand, which had continued on his arm, but he appeared to have forgotten she was there. When they reached the stairs leading down to the entrance, on which several people were crowding, Effie quietly drew back, and fled swiftly along the passage to the ball-room, where she placed herself demurely by Mrs. Mortlake’s side, and suggested that that lady must be very tired, and would like to leave. Mrs. Mortlake had never in her life been tired; and she was beginning to disclaim such an idea, when George came to the rescue, for the third time that evening, and, seeing how pale and worn Effie looked, made it evident to her chaperone that it was time to go.

When Effie reached her own room, and threw herself on to her bed to think, it seemed to her years since she had left the house. She had then been inclined to grumble at the prospect of a dull evening:

what bliss that grumbling seemed in comparison with the sense of shame and misery which she had brought home with her. Nay, the disappointment and desolation of two years ago seemed as nothing to this grief. Gerard a drunkard ! The idol had indeed fallen. Was it shattered ?

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